

BPY-004-RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD (4 Credits)

COURSE INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the BA Philosophy Programme of IGNOU. The curriculum prepared for this degree is relevant and significant. We have included latest scholarship on the course prepared by well known scholars from across the country.

The fourth course that you will study is “Religions of the World.” From the beginning of the great world civilizations, recognition of religions other than one’s own has existed. These religions are known as “world religions” because these have a written record of their teachings. Their doctrines are written down and are known as ‘Sacred Scriptures.’ Our study of the world religions begins when we observe with inquisitiveness and appreciation the plurality of religions.

In this course we have presented 4 blocks comprising 16 units.

Block 1 is an introduction to religion. In this block we have made an attempt to explain the definition, salient features, religious experience, sociology and psychology of religion, and religious pluralism. The concluding unit of the block shows how the study of world religions is multi-disciplinary, multi-methodological and multi-cultural.

Block 2 deals with the religions of Indian origin. The Block deals with Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. All these religions, both theistic and a-theistic, have the doctrine of *karma* and *samsara* in common.

Block 3 studies the religions of the Middle East origin. The Block explains the main teachings of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Block 4 inquires into “Other Religions.” The Other Religions include Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism and Tribal Religions.

Taken together, these Blocks will enable you to understand and appreciate the main teachings of the major religions of the world which are all committed to promote true human and ethical values.

BLOCK -1 INTRODUCTION

We are witnessing today, perhaps more than before, a curious phenomenon. On the one hand, there is a widespread atheism, a religious indifference and dissatisfaction with the organized or institutionalized religion. On the other hand, there is also a widespread search for authentic religious values, a growing need for personal religious experience and an interest in the world's religious pluralism.

One might point out many reasons for this double phenomenon. Religion often stirs up in people a feeling of repulsion because of its other worldly concern, its improvable beliefs, its apparent superstitions, its rigid pattern of behaviour and customs – all of which goes counter to the increasing secular, rational and empirical spirit of human. At the same time, religion also creates a feeling of attraction because of its sense of mystery, of human and spiritual values it promotes, and of its offer of inward peace and happiness. Interest in the multiplicity of religions has been aroused not only by such sciences as anthropology, psychology and sociology and by the coming closer together of people professing different religions and by the need for political and economic cooperation on an international level, but also by the growing awareness on the part of many religious persons of the inherent significance and import of religious pluralism as such. The present block, consisting of 4 units, prepares a student to understand the 'religions of the world' in their historical context and proper perspectives.

Unit 1 on “Religion: Its Salient Features” gives a clear idea about religion. Religion binds humans together and also binds the loose ends of impulses, desires and various processes of individual life. Therefore religion is an integrative experience. All the definitions point to “divine power” as our ultimate concern. The intimate relation between religion and morality is also emphasized in many definitions of religions.

Unit 2 highlights that “Religious Experience” can be considered as the clue to our understanding of religions, as it puts us in touch with the soul of religions. In this unit we browse through three of the classical studies in religious experience and with their help come to the conclusion that religious experiences are primarily integrative experiences that overcome the existential wrongness of human situations. This involves being in touch with a reality that is present in nature, but is not nature. But it is a reality that does not impose itself on us against our will.

Unit 3 reviews “Sociology and Psychology of Religion” with a special emphasis on the contributions made by the world's most renowned sociologists and psychologists of religion. We examine the general characteristics of the sociology and psychology of religion to have a better grasp of the meaning and significance of religion in the world today.

The last Unit, “Religious Pluralism,” focuses its attention on the experience of diversity of religions in our world and in our country and try to understand how we can respond to this dynamic scenario that invites a responsible and creative response. Today people of every religion in the light of their experience of religious plurality are led to reflect on the question of diversity of religions. Why are there many different religions? If God is one, why there is no one religion? How should these religions relate to each other?

The above given 4 units will give you an introductory understanding of religion required to grasp the teachings of religions of the world. Besides, this block will help you to know that all religious experiences, even if at times they appear to be private and personal, have been sociologically and psychologically influenced.



UNIT 1**RELIGION: ITS SALIENT FEATURES**

Contents

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Definition and Nature of 'Religion'
- 1.3 Metaphysical theories of Religion
- 1.4 Religion in its Relation to Other Disciplines: Morality
- 1.5 Let Us Sum UP
- 1.6 Key Words
- 1.7 Further Readings and References
- 1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we study the nature of religion and its salient features. It also makes us understand how religion emerged and the need for it along with various definitions of it.. Further it is necessary to study its relation with other disciplines.

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Grasp the meaning and nature of 'religion'
- Know the common salient features of religion
- Understand the foundational metaphysical theories of religion and religious beliefs
- Draw the intricate relationship between religion and morality; religion and art and religion and science
- Have an idea of conceptual framework within which religion works.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Religion has evolved out of 'life' and hence can never be divorced from it. There is a need in us, for a successful adjustment, which in turn requires an understanding of the world in which we live. We are placed in physical and social environment which consist of fellowmen with their histories and prophecies – that have evolved as a result of competitive and co-operative enterprise of numerous generations. It is a fact that various strands of science, ethics, economics, sociology, history, traditions and myths are all intermingled and entangled. Further, these strands have important claims on the individual and society. But in this wide 'sketch of life' there is an urge to assign a rightful place to individual's impulses. From the time immemorial, philosophy, ethics and religion have played a key role in this master plan of life.

The root meaning of religion is that which binds humans together and also which binds the loose ends of impulses, desires and various processes in individual life. Hence it is our integrative experience both collectively and individually.

1.2 DEFINITION AND NATURE OF RELIGION

Literally the term 'religion' stands for the principle of unification and harmonization (Latin: Religionis: re=back; ligare=bind). The term religion indicates that the two objects of unification were originally unified and that they are only temporarily separated. Religion is thus founded on the faith in the ultimate unity of humans and God. Any religion which seeks to unite human with anything else other than divine is bound to remain imperfect. Various thinkers have attempted to define religion in the following manner:

- 1) Max Müller in his book "Science of Religion" termed religion as "a mental faculty or disposition which enables human to apprehend the infinite".
- 2) E.B.Taylor in his work "Primitive Culture" defines religion as "a belief in spiritual beings".
- 3) Hoffding in his work "Religious Philosophy" describes religion as "faith in the conservation of value."
- 4) Galloway defines religion as a "man's faith in a power beyond himself whereby he seeks to satisfy emotional needs and gains stability of life and which he expresses in acts of worship and service."
- 5) William James defines religion as "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine".
- 6) Mathew Arnold defines religion as "nothing but morality touched with emotion".
- 7) James Martineau : "religion is a belief in an ever living God that is Divine Mind and Will ruling the universe and holding moral relations with mankind".
- 8) Sri Aurobindo observes that "in most essence of religion... is the search for God and finding God. Its aspiration is to discover the infinite, the Absolute, the One, the Divine who is all these things and yet no abstraction but a Being...".

Although, in all the above definitions there is no perfect definition of religion yet each definition brings out one or other essential feature of religion. In every definition of religion, there is a reference to "Power" or "Divine", which is our ultimate concern. It may also be observed that according to thinkers like Mathew Arnold, religion is a matter of morality. A good definition of religion is possible only when a cognizance of its important aspects is taken. Generally it is a process which has two sides, an inner and an outer – according to inner aspect; it is a state of belief and feeling, an inward spiritual disposition. Form the outer side it is an expression of this subjective disposition in appropriate acts. Both these aspects are essential to the nature of religion, and they act and react on one another in the process of spiritual experience. There is "worshipping" and "religious commitment" in practice of any religion. Prior to this, there must be belief in the existence of a 'Higher Power' without which

there cannot be true worship. This belief is a must so that worshipped Being is capable of supplying the needs. Higher powers are worshipped with the intention of having a relation with them. There arises our faith in these powers, out of the sense of need. Feeling, belief and will – these three together constitute religion both in the lowest and highest form of civilization. The key notes of all religion are the feeling of the Infinite, the bowing down before the incomprehensible, the yearning after the unseen love of God, and oneness with Him.

Check your progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Explain how religion evolved

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2) Bring out the nature of religion with reference to various definitions.

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1.3 METAPHYSICAL THEORIES OF RELIGION

The idea of a supreme will or Ground of the world, to which we have been led, calls for some explanation – especially of the relation in which this will stands to the world and to finite minds. This relation of God to cosmos may be understood better if we examine certain conceptions of God which stand out in the historic development of the religious consciousness. In one aspect the development of religion is a development in the representations of God. Further, the various forms of conceiving the Divine object points to the needs of which the growing religious spirit becomes conscious. Of these various representations, three broad types are mentioned in this section which in the nature of the religious consciousness is exhibited most fully in its developed forms. They are deism, pantheism and theism.

Deism

Deism, a pre-dominant religious philosophy of British thinkers, was introduced by Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648) and was greatly popularized by Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), and was also accepted by Charles Darwin (1809-1882). The deistic conception of God was formed under the influence of human analogy. As human is contrasted with one's work so is Deity, here set over against the world that is considered to be one's creation.

According to deism God is perfect, infinite, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient and absolute reality. Since God himself being perfect, created this world as a perfect machine. As the machine (world) being perfect requires no supervision, so God has retired from the world like an absentee landlord. God created human with free will and endowed with the natural light of reason, by virtue of which one could determine one's moral duties. As mentioned above, Darwin supported this view, as he maintained that, God breathed life into a few living cells and imbued them in full potency and powers for their future evolution into various forms through millions of years.

Further, like Charles Darwin, Newton required God to interfere with the workings of the world from time to time to check deviations in the planetary movements. Yet his scientific theory of universal mechanism made God unnecessary in the goings since for Newton this world was a perfect machine. Thus growing science of this particular period made use of this deistic view. Some of the important features of deism are as follows:

- a) God is transcendent to this world. This perfect machine (world), created by a perfect mechanic called God, does not require any divine supervision and interference. Therefore if we pursue this view, consistently, then 'miracles' cannot be allowed.
- b) God is described as absentee God.
- c) God being transcendent remains essentially a "hidden God." This makes God an object beyond worship and knowledge of human.
- d) The great force of deism lies in its acceptance of a natural light in human which alone is taken as the sole authority for deciding things in morality and religion. Therefore it denies the place of revelation in religion. But if God is transcendent then how can he be known, if not through revelation? Thus deism has raised a number of important theological issues. Positively with reference to deistic view it may be observed that, its insistence on the light of reason as the final court of appeal in matters of God and morality in due course, paved the way for rationalism, **scientism and humanism**. Negatively, its emphasis on the transcendence of God robbed the religious minded human of the possibility of one's encounter with and worship of God. Further, since deism accepts that God created the world, the problem of creation ever becomes more difficult for deism to solve and face such questions as – why did a perfect God create the world? How did he create? Out of himself or out of pre-existing matter? Further, did God create the world in void time or did he create time along with the world? Again, if God is perfect, then, is this world of no value to Him? If so, is this creation a mere incidence in the life of God? And if God is infinitely good and omnipotent, then why is there evil at all?

There are no answers to the questions raised above, in any rational form of religious philosophy. And deism certainly claims to be wholly rationalistic. Here God becomes a mere concept of human intellect. Since, deism disregards the language of the heart it could not in the past and cannot at present and in future influence the 'religious mind' who wish to enter into a personal relation with God.

Pantheism

Pantheism is a phase of religious thought opposite to deism and this then has appeared and reappeared in various systems of culture. It has a fascination for certain ideas of religious mind. It had made its mark in the far East, in ancient Egypt and in Greece, among the Western people of Medieval and of modern times. Pantheism impressed the intellect of men and yielded a kind of satisfaction to the human heart. The Pantheistic theory holds that all is God and God is all. This is derived from two Greek roots – ‘Pan’ and ‘Theos’. The following is the translation of one of the verse from BhagwadGita; in which it is stated that “He who sees all in Me, I am never lost to him and he is never lost to me”. Again, the same thought from another upanishadic text (Isavasyopanisad) mentions that, “he who sees all the animate in God and sees God in everything living, can hate none”.

Unlike deism, pantheism is a much older system of thought. It is closely related to mystic experiences. Some of the pantheists have been highly intellectual philosophers. Sankara, Spinoza, Upanishadic seers and Buddhist thinkers are classed among world intellectuals.

Pantheism somehow appears to be an elusive word whose spiritual significance is not well defined. Therefore this theory like idealism denotes a movement of thought which has passed into various forms and phases – whose religious meaning may not be identical. Materialistic pantheism and idealistic pantheism are two broad forms of pantheism. Some pantheistic systems posit God as self-conscious. Some declare that the world is real, while others maintain that it is an illusion. As a result, it becomes difficult to give a general notion of pantheism. One can aim at a clean and consistent doctrine with spiritual and ethical values which are definitely determined. Further, in pantheism, it is difficult to explain the variety of the world. Sankara’s version of pantheism theorizes that this variety is false, since everything is identical with God. Another difficulty in accepting the pantheistic view is that we do observe differences in the characteristics attributed to the world and those attributed to God. Again, if God is taken as immanent in this world, then is he not inheriting all the ills and defects of this world?

Theism

Theism shaped itself out of the needs and desires of the religious spirit and not consciously developing a view that would unite what is true in deism and pantheism. Theism as a form of religious belief understands God as a supernatural person, who is also the creator of value – evolving world. He is transcendent to the world as well as its immanent principle. In theism, God is an individual and spiritual personality with whom it is possible to establish a variety of different relationships. The chief characteristic of theistic God is that he possesses a personality which enables Him to accept the devotion and prayers of his followers and to help them. He is infinite yet endowed with all qualities, the creator, the protector and the sustainer

of the world. The omnipresent God of theism is primary as well as material cause of the universe. The history of Indian philosophical and religious thought is full of religious sects who have contributed to theism.

Since theism satisfies our religious inclinations, it has found supporters in the East as well as in the West. But from the philosophical standpoint it may not be a satisfactory view. It may be observed that from philosophical standpoint God loses his quality of infinity if qualities are attributed to it since whatever quality is attributed to God implies the destruction of opposite quality. Further, the purpose of creation is not clear. Is there a need for God to create this world? If he does, then he is incomplete and if not, then, it is difficult to explain the purpose of God creating this world. Also, there is a clash in attributes between omnipotence and omnibenevolence of God with reference to presence of evil in this world. Thus, it is true that for a religious mind, although theism is a satisfactory theory of relation between God and the world, philosophically it is subject to many criticisms.

Foundation of religious belief

In case of practicing religion, it is an experience of the whole person which means that it includes one's cognition, conation and affection, conscious and unconscious in their totality. According to the religious mind, there is something in human nature which prompts one heavenward. In prophetic religions it is maintained that, there is the "breath" of God in human which directs one to find rest in Him. In general it may be said that, human is endowed with a strong pre-disposition towards one's spiritual quest. This spiritual pursuit in human gives rise to religious belief. But the term 'belief' may be analyzed as follows: 'belief-in' is an attitude to a person, whether human or Divine; and 'believe-that' refers to a proposition. That is, a proposition for which some reason can be demanded. Both in belief-in and believe-that, there is an element of trust. When we believe-in something, there is a meaning to it – in the sense – good at, implying efficient skills or effective in producing certain good results at all times. Thus belief-in God is highly evaluative and not merely factual, that is, acceptance of an existential proposition, in other words, religious belief is not merely cognitive and cannot be fully understood only in terms of factual or scientific knowledge. It has an element of heart, of affectiveness and warmth of feelings. Thus, the foundation of religious belief rests on reason, revelation, faith and mystic experience.

Reason: the function of a reason is to control and guide the cognitive aspect in human. Religion drives human in search of one's ideal self, which is put forth in one's religious upbringing. But the nature of the deity which embodies this ideal self, gets exposed to increasing knowledge, which we consider as our highest concern. Therefore, rational faculty in human helps one to establish one's belief in the kind of deity whom one worships.

Reason helps in solving many religious issues. However, it remains a regulative force in all possible sources of religious beliefs. Mystic experience, revelation and faith, all in one way or the other, are responsible for religious beliefs, and reason remains a helpful guide in every one of them.

Revelation: To reveal means to 'discover.' Revelation brings into light what was hidden before. God, Brahman, is essentially considered to be unknown. Hence, God remains a supernatural and supersensuous entity. God being transcendent lies beyond the ordinary means of knowing. But human beings have an inner urge to know God. Therefore, humans stand in need of some sort of promptings through God. He reveals himself through prophetic religious scriptures and also through workings of nature. God's revelation is also possible through the grace of God, which cannot be objectively analyzed.

Faith: it is the most crucial, fundamental and significant tenet of religious life and behavior. It is both, the necessary and sufficient condition of religious life. There can be no religion without faith. There is a correlation between the depth and gravity of religious life and the depth and gravity of faith. If one's faith is superficial, then it will lack the firmness in commitment towards religion. There is a kind of certainty in having faith in God. But it is not born out of scientific knowledge. According to Kant, faith has subjective certainty sufficient for action, but insufficient for objective knowledge.

Some of the general characteristics of faith include:

- 1) The object of faith in the religious sense is the ultimate concern of human.
- 2) Faith cannot be reduced to ordinary or scientific knowledge.
- 3) Faith includes all aspects of a human being at work and means all-pervasive attitude to the whole reality, society and one's total relationship.
- 4) Faith is a matter of human's total self-involvement and full commitment to a certain field of action. Faith without actions is like a tree without fruits.
- 5) There is total self-surrendering to God.
- 6) Faith is a source of inspiration and encouragement in life.

The Mystic Experience

Mysticism is the part and parcel of a genuine religious experience in the purest and concentrated form. It is the most distinctive feature of Indian religions. It is found in Upanishads, Advaitism, Bhakti culture and Shri Ramkrishna's experiences. Mysticism is also found in the thoughts of people of ancient Greece, for example, Plotinus. In Contemporary Western Philosophy, French Philosopher, Henry Bergson, represents its. The Sufis subscribe to mysticism. But the mystics have also been subjected to and very often they have been deemed as psycho-neurotic persons. In mystical experience either there is complete or partial identification of worshipper with the supreme object of worship. The mystics enjoy, i.e. there

is happiness, mental efficiency and a friendly relationship with everyone. Mysticism is a method of the realization of Ultimate Reality. The important characteristics of mysticism are as follows:

- 1) It involves personal relation with Ultimate Reality.
- 2) The mystic considers intellectual knowledge to be useless for the realization of his goal.
- 3) William James mentions, four marks of mystical experience:
 - a) Ineffability- measures mystical experiences, defies expression, as no adequate report of its contents can be given in words.
 - b) Noetic Quality means there is an insight into depth of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. In other words, it is some kind of illumination, revelation of object of worship.
 - c) Transiency refers to the fact that it cannot be sustained for a long time.
 - d) Passivity is the mystic's feeling that one's will is in abeyance and a superior will wholly grasps in power.

Check your progress 2

Note : a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

- 1) Define 'Pantheism'. Is it a satisfactory theory of relation between God and world?

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- 2) Explain the role of reason, revelation, mystical experience and faith as foundation of religious belief.

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1.4 RELIGION IN ITS RELATION TO OTHER DISCIPLINES: MORALITY

Different views have been taken with reference to the relation of religion to morality.

- 1) Religion and morality are inseparable and interdependent.
- 2) Religion is independent of morality.
- 3) Morality is independent of religion as an autonomous discipline.

Interdependence of religion and morality

In higher or more developed religions morality and religion remains inseparable. For example, Judaism and Christianity have accepted the Ten Commandments which reflects morality. Some of these commandments are the same as 'pancha mahavrata' of Jainism as well as all Indian religions. Thus religion and morality are inseparable and interdependent at least in the traditional

and higher religions of the world. By 'interdependence' is meant that religion helps morality and morality in turn keeps on refining religious demands. Even when morality is regarded as independent of religion, religion does not remain wholly discarded. Both Kant and R.B. Braithwaite postulate God as the psychological booster of morality. Performance of one's duty should be regarded as Divine command, according to Kant. Religion with its derivative of 're' and 'legere' means to bind also the loose ends of lower impulses within each person, hence morality includes both the external and the interiorized rules of conduct. Both in Christianity and Hinduism the emphasis is laid on the interiorization of morality in the direction of self-conquest and self-culture of the soul. In general morality is the purifier of religion and religion is said to be the perfection of morality, for God is said to be the conservator of all values. Therefore, God is the embodiment of morality and chief guardian.

Religion as independent of morality

In primitive religions there is more of magic than morality. In early forms of religion there is more of taboo than morality. While practicing religion the devotee becomes so holy that one commits no sins, only holy acts flow from. Morality remains valid at the dualistic stage. However, when one becomes one with Brahman then action ceases, for there is none to whom one can do either good or bad. Thus there are religious thoughts when morality is either not invoked as in certain primitive forms of religion or where one goes beyond the stage of morality.

Autonomy of morality

Kant has powerfully argued for the case of autonomy of morality. According to him, morality is good not because God wills it, but God wills it because it is good. Since the time of Kant, the autonomy of morals has become an accepted creed. Thinkers have regarded religion as a set of moral principles either with emotions or backed by stories. In spite of the good which religion has done to the development of morality, according to Freud, morality must be made independent of religion. But morality without religion remains a hoax. Therefore, religion is regarded as a psychological booster. Kant recommended that duties should be performed as divine commands, because he felt that the performance of duties is difficult for humans without such a booster, hence religion and morality have to go together by refining, criticizing and sublimation of one with another.

Religion and Art

Religion is a holistic response of humans to Absolute Reality. Hence, it includes all the three mental processes of cognition, conation, and affection. God is said to be the embodiment of Truth, Beauty and Goodness. So, art in which the aspect of beauty dominates can also be used to serve religion. For example, music, poetry, architecture, and painting are all used in religion in its performance. By doing so, religion is made attractive and popular in the masses. Also art becomes sanctified and sublimated when pressed in service of religion.

Religion cannot be separated from art because art includes a great many cultural expressions without which no civilized life is possible. As mentioned above, art includes so many forms that even the most primitive life is not possible without it. However, it is also observed that, artistic creations were there in primitive society without reference to religion. For example, artistic drawings of animals in the caved dwellings of primitive humans are more for the magical success of hunting than for Totemistic worship. Also in modern times art is pursued for the sake of art. Many television shows tend to promote secular interest largely for pushing the sale of industrial products. In modern times, much of poetry, music, architecture, dancing and all such pursuits have no religious end.

Religion goes with morality. Hence, art without religion means bereft of moral and spiritual values. We know that some of the most inspiring pieces of poetry sculpture; archeological remains have been sanctified by religion. It is also true that art cannot remain confined to singing of praises to God. For this reason, in recent times, there is the cry “art for the art sake.” In the end it should be noted that, art without the sobering effect of religion, tends to be vulgarized. The reason is that art works through sensuous forms, which tend to restrict the advance of human towards one’s higher spiritual pursuits.

Religion and Science

Science began through the purposive activity of humans ,who tried to adjust means to ends so that one had a better bargain in the struggle for existence. Hence, one began to use crude weapons like rough flint with which one could capture wild animals for food. Such a habit of manipulation of means to ends gave rise to reflective spirit in human from which arose the desire to understand. Human realized the importance of understanding the causal connection of things. The scientific spirit thus evolved on this practical basis: First, to comprehend the relations of objects and then to formulate the laws of their workings.

The aim of science is to establish continuity between the elements given in outer experience; such continuity is achieved by means of the principle of cause and effect which is based on the pre-supposition that phenomena are really connected with one another. Those events which constantly recur due to causal connection are given the name “laws of nature;” they are the convenient summaries of the behavior of things. The aim of the scientific thinker is to reach wider and wider laws which describe the working of nature as mechanically connected system of parts. Science may therefore be regarded as a language by which the mind tries to know, the largest number of facts. Among the sciences, the natural sciences are in themselves, neither religious nor anti-religious. They deal with facts of outer experience which do not raise any religious issues.

There may be many aspects of our life experiences, which are ignored by science on the ground that they are irrelevant to its purpose. Thus, the scientist does not want to know the “what and the why” of the ultimate reality, again is not interested in the qualitative character of objects. Further, one is not concerned with the existence of realm of ends, personal values and ideals. Also, the validity of spiritual values does not concern the scientist.

The devotion of science only to objects and its method leads to narrow specialisms. It misconceives and exaggerates the range and significance of its own activity by extending its methods and principles to the whole universe. Thus, it leads to a purely naturalistic interpretation of goals and values, which is not really correct. Again, strictly mechanical conception of experience reduces its spiritual view of the world to mere illusion.

Such a conception of experience has been resisted by religion because religious postulates transcend natural order and therefore cannot be validated by the criteria of the natural sciences. Thus, the relation between religion and science is one of fundamental antagonism because affirmation on one side is met with blank denial on the other. It shows that science cannot rightly pass judgments on the nature and value of religion.

On the other hand, religion and its point of view is more comprehensive and therefore has a bearing on the scientific interpretation of the world. Like philosophy, religion too, gives us a world view. Hence, the scientific view must find a place within the religious view. Science and religion need not oppose each other – rather they are related to one another, like the partial is to the more complete or the causal is to the teleological. In other words, continuity between elements within the experienced world rests upon the wider principle of a final cause or end

which is realized in and through them. The world is interested in religion because it points to the supremacy of purpose. From this point of view, science and religion represent two levels of experience, with science as the lower and religion as the higher.

Check your progress 3

Note : a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Are religion and science opposed to each other? Explain.

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2) Show the relation between art and religion

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1.5 LET US SUM UP

Religion has evolved out of life experience. It binds humans together and also binds the loose ends of impulses, desires and various processes of individual life. Therefore, religion is an integrative experience. All the definitions refer to “Divine Power” as our ultimate concern. The intimate relation between religion and morality is also emphasized in many definitions of religions. The aim of religion is to explain the relation of God to the world. God as either transcendent or immanent or both – is conceived in deism, pantheism and theism respectively. Religious activities and religion as a whole centres around the concepts like belief, miracles, mystical experiences, worship and faith. Relation of religion to science although appears antagonistic in the beginning due to their different methodologies, in the end it is observed that they do explain events in a complementary way. Religion and morality from time immemorial are interdependent on each other, although in principle they may be thought of as existing independently of each other. Art and religion are interdependent on each other, however in modern times art may be said to exist for the sake of art.

1.6. KEY WORDS

Scientism: The term scientism describes the view that natural science has authority over all other interpretations of life, such as philosophical, religious, mythical, spiritual, or humanistic explanations, and over other fields of inquiry, such as the social sciences.

Humanism: Humanism affirms the dignity and worth of all people based on the ability to determine right and wrong by appealing to universal human qualities, particularly rationality, without resorting to the supernatural or alleged divine authority from religious texts.

1.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your progress I

1) Religion has evolved out of 'life' and hence can never be divorced from it. There is a need in us, for a successful adjustment, which in turn requires an understanding of the world in which we live

2) Although, in all the above definitions there is no perfect definition of religion yet each definition brings out one or other essential feature of religion. In every definition of religion, there is a reference to "Power" or "Divine", which is our ultimate concern. It may also be observed that according to thinkers like Mathew Arnold, religion is a matter of morality. A good definition of religion is possible only when a cognizance of its important aspects is taken. Generally it is a process which has two sides, an inner and an outer – according to inner aspect, it is a state of belief and feeling, an inward spiritual disposition. Form the outer side it is an expression of this subjective disposition in appropriate acts. Both these aspects are essential to the nature of religion, and they act and react on one another in the process of spiritual experience.

Check your progress II

1) Pantheism is a phase of religious thought opposite to deism and this then has appeared and reappeared in various systems of culture. Pantheism impressed the intellect of humans and yielded a kind of satisfaction to the human heart. The Pantheistic theory holds that all is God and God is all.

2) **Reason:** the function of a reason is to control and guide the cognitive aspect in human. Religion drives human in search of one's ideal self, which is put forth in one's religious upbringing. But the nature of the deity which embodies this ideal self, gets exposed to increasing knowledge, which we consider as our highest concern. Therefore, rational faculty in human helps to establish one's belief in the kind of deity whom one worships. **Revelation** brings into light what was hidden before. God, Brahman, is essentially considered to be unknown. God reveals himself through prophetic religious scriptures and also through workings of nature. God's revelation is possible also through the grace of God, which cannot be objectively analyzed.

Faith is the most crucial, fundamental and significant tenet of religious life and behavior. It is both the necessary and sufficient condition of religious life. There can be no religion without faith. According to Kant, faith has subjective certainty sufficient for action, but insufficient for objective knowledge.

Check your progress III

1) Science and religion need not oppose each other – for they are related to each other, like the partial is to the more complete or the causal is to the teleological. In other words, continuity between elements within the experienced world rests upon the wider principle of a final cause or end which is realized in and through them. The world is interested in religion because it points to the supremacy of purpose. From this point of view, science and religion represent two levels of experience, with science as the lower and religion as the higher.

2) Religion is a holistic response of humans to absolute Reality. Hence, it includes all the three mental processes of cognition, conation, and affection. God is said to be the embodiment of truth, beauty and goodness. So, art in which the aspect of beauty dominates can also be used to serve religion. For example, music, poetry, architecture, and painting are all used in religion in its performance. By doing so, religion is made attractive and popular in the masses. Also art becomes sanctified and sublimated when pressed in service of religion.



UNIT 2 RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Importance of Religious Experience
- 2.3 What is Experience?
- 2.4 Study of Religious Experience: A Brief History.
- 2.5 Some Classical Texts
- 2.6 What is Religious Experience?
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Key Words
- 2.9 Suggested Readings and References
- 2.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

Religions are pretty complex things –as complex as human beings themselves. Just as human beings are made up of mind and body, body and soul, intellect and emotions, the conscious and the unconscious, individual personality and a social nature, religions also exhibit a similar complexity. Faced with such complexity, it is very easy to identify religion with one or the other of these dimensions and miss out on the whole that religion is. This unit is meant to enable you to see in a holistic manner, not by studying all its parts, but by studying the spirit that animates religion as a whole, namely, religious experience. By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Say why religious experience is important in the study of religions
- Identify some key authors and the title/s of their book on religious experience.
- Have an adequate understanding of religious experience

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Let us begin with the last objective –an adequate understanding of religious experience. What kind of understanding can be considered adequate? Our understanding would be considered adequate if it identifies at least some characteristic features of religious experience in general. These features should be *general* enough because if we identify religious experience with Nirvana of the Buddhists, for example, we would be neglecting experiences that are typical of other traditions. Secondly, our understanding must pick out the typical of religious experience *alone*. In other words, it should not be so broad and general as to apply to other, non-religious

experiences. If we identify religious experience with ecstasy and bliss, for example, such experiences might as well be induced by drugs and alcohol, but it may not have any features that religious people consider essential to religious experience. Given the complexity of religions, it is a difficult task to arrive at an adequate understanding of religious experience. Still this is what we shall attempt to do.

In coming to an adequate understanding of religious experience, we shall proceed, first by reflecting on the nature experience in general and come to the realization that such a procedure is problematic for considering the nature of religious experience. This, in turn, would lead us look at some of the classical texts in the study of religious experience. Armed with the insights gained from that study we shall proceed give a characterization of religious experience. Let us begin, however, with some considerations about the importance of religious experience.

2.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

When we think of religions the first thing that is likely to come to our mind are the temples, mosques and churches that dot our land. But when we think about them a little more we begin to realize that temples and mosques and churches are merely the tip of the icebergs that we call religions. It is merely one of the many observable, external aspects. There are also others. These external dimensions of religions can generally be brought under 4 Cs:

- Creed (beliefs systems and doctrines),
- Code (rules of conduct, some of which may even seem unethical to outsiders),
- Cult (worship and adoration),
- Community (some religions emphasize this dimension more than the others).

These visible, external, aspects of religions can be studied under various disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, history, sociology, psychology, and so on. But apart from these external aspects, religions also have an internal, spiritual side that is invisible. We could consider this invisible side of religions as religious experience. Doing yoga and *namaz*, attending worship and so on, for example, are visible; but the inner peace and tranquillity one achieves by doing such activities is something that happens in the invisible interior of persons. Religious experience, then, can be considered the spirit of religion in the sense that it provides the end or goal of the various religious practices and observances, in as much as this end is obtainable in this life. (It is necessary to add the clause “in as much as it is obtainable in this life” because most religions would not be satisfied only with gaining such experiences in this life, but also look forward to a life of immortality and eternal bliss.)

Religious experience can also be considered as the spirit of religion in another sense. This is best explained by considering historical religions like Buddhism or Christianity. Take the case of Buddhism. The foundational principle of Buddhism can be found in that profound experience of its founder, Gautama Buddha, which is his Enlightenment. Similarly Christianity is based on the experience of what the Christians call their experience of the Christ-event, namely, how a group of people who were the disciples of Jesus experienced their guru in his life, teachings, death and after death (they called it the resurrection of their master). Both the Buddhist and the Christian religions, then, can be seen as attempts at institutionalizing and perpetuating these foundational experiences in the form of certain records that has come to be accepted as their sacred scriptures and certain religious practices, like certain modes of worship and meditation. All the above

mentioned externals of creed, code, cult and community are institutional instruments meant to perpetuate these experiences so that they can be passed on from one generation to the next. Religious experiences, therefore, can be seen as the source of these religions. Can we say that this is true, not only of historical religions like Buddhism, but also of other religions like Hinduism? It seems true of Hinduism too, in as much as it accepts normative scriptures like the Vedas and the Upanishads which contain some of the primitive religious experiences of ancient Indians. Therefore, it seems reasonable to generalize our point and say that religions originate in certain religious experiences and seek to institutionalize those experiences.

Why to institutionalize such experiences? The answer is simple enough. Those who have had these experiences consider them to be so valuable that they want all the others to have a share of what they have experienced. Religion itself, then, may be defined as institutionalizations of certain experiences with a view to inducing those experiences in its followers.

The last phrase is significant. For most people, being religious means to be a part of a community and share in its mode of worship, accept its belief system and doing what that traditions demands. We could call it conventional religiosity: it is a matter of following the demands of a tradition. Asking questions about the meaning of those practices, or seeking a personal religious experience is not a part of conventional religiosity. Conventional religiosity is a habit, a custom, a tradition that is received and is carried on. Such religious believers are dangerous. If they are ardent followers of a tradition, they become fanatics who want to maintain their tradition at any cost, even by killing others. On the other hand, if they are not ardent followers, they can be easily weaned away from their religion to atheistic and agnostic ways.

However, unlike these run-of-the-mill believers, there are others for whom religion is a personal and living reality. They may carry on a tradition if they find it meaningful, or abandon it when it is not found meaningful. For this group of people religious experience is extremely significant. If they criticise received traditions it is on the basis of their experience; if they maintain traditional practices it is because they see those practices as significant in terms of their experience. William James called such people “religious geniuses”. What he meant is that just as there are ordinary scientists and extraordinarily gifted ones (like Newton or Einstein), so too, there are geniuses in religion. Most religious founders and reformers belong to this category of religious geniuses. Whenever genuine religious spirit is threatened, they step in to bring about a new religiosity.

The long and short of this discussion is that religious experiences constitute the spirit of the complex entities we call religions. Religious experiences are the spirit of religions in the twofold sense of being the origin and goal, source and summit of religions (with the above mentioned qualification regarding goal). It is the religion of those who are genuinely religious and whom others try to follow.

If religious experience is the soul of religions, it is important to know what religious experience is.

Check your progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What are the requirements of an adequate understanding of religious experience?

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2) What are the external elements of religion?

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2.3 WHAT IS EXPERIENCE?

A good starting point for considering what an experience is would be to reflect on the examples just given. When we speak of experiencing the breeze or the setting sun and so on, we are thinking of an object or an event (a happening). But it is also obvious that merely there being an object or event is not an experience. For anything to be an experience, besides the presence of an object or event we must also be aware of it. Therefore we can say that an experience is an object or an event which enters into our consciousness. But a little more reflection would show that this definition is still not correct. The First World War is an event that has entered into my consciousness in as much as I know about it; but it is not an event that I have experienced; I was not even born then. I know about it from history books and not directly from my experience. Therefore we need to qualify our statement further by adding a third element to our definition of experience, namely directness. Experience, then, is direct or immediate awareness of an object or an event. Thus, experience is an immediate or direct awareness of an object or an event, unlike such sources of awareness as testimony, inference and so on.

The definition of experience we have just given can be considered the episodic view because experience is understood as an episode, a particular happening in consciousness (as in “that was a memorable experience”). But there are others who argue that this view ignores the most important characteristic of experience, namely, the expertise that comes from many years of hard work. For example, when we talk some one as an experienced teacher, experienced architect, experienced politician, and so on, we are obviously not referring to a person who has undergone an episode. Teaching a class once does not make me an experienced teacher; it is repeated acts of teaching that makes me an experienced teacher. Experience in this sense is an expertise, the result of hard work. While episodes are occasional happenings, expertise is a more permanent achievement.

This view makes an important point and has special significance when it comes to religious experience, as we will have occasion to see. On the other hand, we have no reason to consider episodes and expertise as mutually exclusive. There would be no expertise were it not for repeated episodes of experience. Moreover, in some cases, repeated episodes may not even be necessary to have a lasting impact on the person (as in the conversion experience of St. Paul that we learn in the New Testament) and in some other cases, repetition may be impossible as in experiencing the death of a loved one. In such cases an “isolated moment of heightened awareness” makes all the difference and brings about lasting impacts on those who have the experience. Therefore, we shall stick to our episodic definition of experience, with its triple components of an object or event, an

awareness of the object, and the direct manner in which this awareness enters our consciousness. But we shall keep in mind that wherever possible, repeated episodes leading to expertise are to be treasured more than isolated individual happenings.

If we apply our general understanding of 'experience' to characterize religious experience, we will have to say that religious experience is an experience of religious objects. This is not entirely false; people do speak of experiencing divine objects or persons (God, Virgin Mary etc.) While it is not entirely false to speak of religious 'objects' there is a preliminary difficulty with this definition: What would qualify to be a religious object? There seems to be numerous candidates that qualify to be such objects (God, Nirvana, Brahman, Virgin Mary, Kali and so on). Moreover, to speak of God or any other as "objects" of religious experience is a red-herring because these so called religious objects are not objects at all, in our ordinary understanding of objects since these are not available to our senses as other objects of experience are. If we are not to define religious experience in terms of experienced objects, how else are we to define religious experience?

One way of doing it is to say that a religious experience is an experience that occurs in a religious tradition or in contexts like that of religious worship or meditation. This is sure to include the Buddhist experience, but it leads to a more serious problem: original religious experiences like the Enlightenment of Buddha would be excluded by such a definition, in as much as it took place outside the traditional religious context and gave birth to a new religion. How, then shall we go about defining religious experience? Ordinarily we define something either by appealing to common experience or to those who are proficient users of that idea. We did not have any serious difficulty in circumscribing the meaning of 'experience' because it was possible to appeal to common experiences. But that does not seem possible in the case of religious experience. Let us turn, then, to the other alternative and see how experts have tried to deal with religious experience. For this purpose we shall turn to the classical studies on religious experience.

2.4 STUDY OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE: A BRIEF HISTORY

If religious experiences constitute the source and summit of religions, one would expect that they would find a prominent place in the philosophy of religion. However, this has not always been the case. Philosophical attention to religious experience is a modern development. Prior to the modern period, what used to arouse the interest of the philosophers of religion were matters dealing with the existence of God, the nature of Brahman, relationships between God and the world, God and the soul, and so on. They used to routinely engage in arguments for the existence of God, for example. The modern interest in the study of religious experience came about, paradoxically, with the realization that such arguments for the existence of God do not prove much and they do not take us far. Counter-arguments of thinkers like David Hume and Immanuel Kant were instrumental in exposing the shortcomings of such arguments. Many educated people even began to look down upon religious beliefs as unworthy of intelligent and educated people. Kantian philosophy made religion an adjunct of morality. It is under such adverse circumstances that the study of religious experience came to prominence. Let us briefly look at certain key thinkers who have contributed to the study of religious experience.

2.5 SOME CLASSICAL TEXTS

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768 - 1834)

We noted that whenever genuine religious spirit is under threat there arise certain religious geniuses who can rise to the need of the hour. Schleiermacher was such a genius. He had a deep personal sense of religion. On the other hand, he kept the company of those who despised religion as a mix of meaningless inherited dogmas and practices that threatened free thinking and individual creativity. It is to this group of Romantic friends that he addressed his first great book, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (1799). His personal sense of religion enabled him to see that religion is not morality (as Kantian philosophy tended to see). Nor is it doctrines and dogmas detrimental to human flourishing, as his Romantic friends thought. He tried to persuade his friends that genuine religion is rooted in a kind of experience that is *sui generis*. Doctrines and practices have only a derived status; they arise from reflecting upon these experiences.

How does he understand religious experience? Religious experience, for him, is the “integrative element of human life and culture”. It is a feeling of absolute dependence on something that is infinite, but manifesting itself in all that is finite.

William James (1842-1910)

If the many roles of a pioneering psychologist, medical doctor and philosopher with a flair for literature could be combined into one person, that is William James. His classic work on religious experience is *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. As the title suggests, the book is full of anecdotes from all over the world narrating all kinds of religious experiences. It is a veritable encyclopaedic collection of experiences enriched with his penetrating comments and insightful reflections. So very influential has this work been that it would be hard to find a book on the philosophy religious experience today that will not have at least a reference to it. But it is not a book that lends itself to summarising. James has something to say about all the major issues in religion that are being discussed today. But I shall merely point out two of his ideas selected almost arbitrarily.

The first concerns the existential character of religion. If Schleiermacher was instrumental in bringing about the Copernican revolution in religious thinking by emphasising human religious experience as the appropriate starting point (instead of received doctrines, scriptures and revelations) of religious reflection, James took it to a further level by pointing out the existential nature of religious experience. He pointed out that religion is primarily about a sense of wrongness or uneasiness about the human situation, a wrongness that is corrected by ‘making proper connection with the higher powers’.

Another key topic of his discussion is mystical experiences, which he considers to be ‘the root and centre’ of all religious experience. Although most mystical experiences involve elaborate training in different religious traditions, he also notes that nature seems to have peculiar ability to induce mystical moods in us. Such experiences have come to be known as “nature mysticism”. But what is mysticism? James’s study of mystical experiences led him to conclude that mystical experiences involve a ‘cosmic consciousness’ that tends toward monism and pantheism. He also points out the effects of such experience in terms the optimism it generates.

Rudolf Otto (1869-1937)

Otto was a widely travelled German who was exposed to different religions of the world. He, like Schleiermacher and James, was absolutely convinced that the religious realm is *sui generis*. In other words religious experience cannot be understood adequately in terms of anything else, say in biological, chemical or psychological terms. It needs to be understood in its own terms. What is even more disconcerting to the philosopher is that he holds religion to have a non-rational core which cannot be articulated in language. He does not deny the rational side of religion; his point is that if we focus only on the rational side, we miss out on what is properly speaking the religious character of religious experience. To this non-rational, non-explainable element of religion he gave the name “Numinous”. In order to show this non-rational character of such experiences he avoids using ordinary words to describe them, preferring to use Latin words instead. If the religious realm cannot be explained in words, how can it be known? It can be known because everyone has an inborn sense of the numinous. It cannot be explained, but it can be evoked indirectly. His classic work, *The Idea of the Holy* is such an attempt to awaken in the reader the sense of the numinous through a rational discussion and analysis of similar experiences in the natural realm. Numinous is said to be *mysterium tremendum* (awesome mystery).

Check your progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What are the three components of an experience?

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2) What is religious experience for Schleiermacher?

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2.6 WHAT IS RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE?

It is clear that none of these authors talk about religious experience in terms of the object experienced. On the contrary, all of them do by turning to the subject of experience. How then, can we identify religious experience? We are not completely helpless in the matter. There is a special class of experiences that are often referred to as “nature mysticism”, that are relatively independent of such conditioning. Here is one of the most commonly quoted examples from William Blake:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand

And Eternity in an hour.

What is noteworthy is that the poet sees the same grain of sand and wild flower as the rest of us, but what he sees on this occasion is not just that; he sees a 'world' in a grain of sand, a 'heaven' in a wild flower; he experiences 'infinity' and 'eternity'. In other words, such experiences take place *in and through the nature* but are *not an experiences of nature* that all of us have in our ordinary state of consciousness. There is something more than nature that is involved here.

While this example of nature mysticism makes us aware of a class of experiences that is universal and draws our attention to the "more" that is experienced in nature, it lacks a crucial component of religious experiences that James brought to our attention, namely, their existential character: an awareness of the wrongness of our situation and its overcoming. The following example is better in this respect than the previous one.

One day I was feeling deeply depressed by the severe criticisms a colleague had received –a person who was living his life in an honest and truthful sense.... Nothing was real...

After the children had gone to bed, I decided to go for a walk. The night was dark, filled with black clouds. Large white flakes of snow fell on and around me. Inside, a surging restlessness replaced my benumbed state. ...Suddenly without understanding in any way, I experienced a transcendental beauty in the white darkness. It was difficult to walk on the glazed, iced surface... Immediately I felt a chill but at the same time I felt the ice being warmed as my fingers touched it. It was a moment of communion, an experience of knowing and understanding, and a feeling of complete solace. I felt my inward heaviness lifting, and discovered a new capacity for...facing conflicts which existed around and in me.... We need only reach out in natural covering to come face to face with creation.

The person is in a state that is far from welcome. He feels depressed, restless, benumbed; life is seen as meaningless and futile ("Nothing was real"). But it is the transition from that stage which is astounding: from a sense of depression and desolation, he is transported into a sense of communion and solace, knowing and understanding. The realization that reality is just waiting for us to reach out beyond its natural covering so that we can find solace and understanding is remarkable.

Let us now cast our net wider than nature mysticism and find other kinds of experiences that are not conditioned by particular religions and cultures, but still maintain this sense of affinity with the wider universe. Ian Ramsey, who had an excellent understanding of religion, brought to our attention a class of experiences he called "cosmic disclosures". He writes:

it may happen that when we are faced with some major problem as to vocation, or emigration, or the suffering of an aged relative, or marriage, there occurs a complex set of circumstances, too complex and too diversified to be the result of any one man's design, which helps us to resolve the problem as well for those around us as for ourselves. ...A sense of kinship with nature strikes us; the Universe is reliable after all.

Having seen these examples, it is now time to analyse these experiences. All these experiences make us aware of a twofold nature of reality: there is the natural world that we are ordinarily aware and something "more" than the natural world that comes to our awareness in these experiences alone. The second example alludes to it in talking about reaching beyond the natural

covering; the third example alludes to it more vaguely in terms of a kinship with nature. The “more” is an expression used by William James to refer to this reality that cannot be identified with the natural. Otto referred to it as the “wholly other”, “that which is beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar...” This twofold character of reality usually finds expression in such terms as natural and supernatural, profane and sacred, vyavaharika sat and Paramarthika sat etc.

Secondly, there is some vague awareness about the nature of this sacred reality. Although it may not be entirely appropriate to talk of monism to refer to it, as James does, what is clear is that there is an intuitive awareness of certain unity or connectedness of all reality that is ordinarily seen as many. Some call this One reality God, others call this One reality Brahman, still others find none of these substantive terms appropriate and therefore call it *Sunyata*. Since this is a non-rational, non-conceptual reality as Otto insists, these different ways of talking about that reality is not only understandable, but even necessary get us beyond our words. Moreover, there emerges an awareness that this reality is the really real such that “We only begin to wake to reality when we realize that the material world, the world of space and time, as it appears to our senses, is nothing but a sign and a symbol of mystery which infinitely transcends it.”

Thirdly, religious experiences have this existential character that is obvious in the second and third examples. There is an awareness of the wrongness of a given situation and an overcoming of that wrongness by being connected to a larger reality that is hidden behind the natural covering. However, we should always be wary of talking about this connectedness of reality in terms of a purely intellectual or abstract cosmic order as may be done in physics and cosmology. Rather, this connectedness is always in relation to human existential situations. Devoid of that context, no talk of a cosmic order or inter-connectedness of reality would have a religious character.

Fourthly, although we relied on spontaneous experiences that occur without any prior preparation so as to keep our understanding of religious experience broad enough, we should also be aware that most religious experiences do involve some prior preparation in the form of practices like yoga and meditation, regular prayer and interior silence, acts of worship and adoration. But what is remarkable is that even when prior preparation is involved, the experience itself is not seen as an automatic result of those practices. There is a sense of passivity in such experiences, a feeling of having been gratuitously granted a favour. Theistic traditions call it grace; but this sense of passivity is also present in the other traditions in some form or another. The Buddhist Enlightenment (including the Zen “satori” or awakening), for example, might come at the end of years of study and meditation; but when it comes it is experienced as a sudden flash and not brought about by one’s will. The very term ‘Enlightenment’ signifies this. Spiritual masters often warn their disciples that too intense an effort can be counter-productive. One is advised to “let-go”. Taking both these points together, we could say that religious experience is more like a change of gestalt than accumulation of knowledge or data.

Taking these points together we could briefly say that a *religious experience is an experience of cosmic connectedness and personal integration achieved through that connectedness; its opposite would be an experience of disintegration and alienation.*

Check your progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What is religious experience? Explain its characteristic features.

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2.6 LET US SUM UP

Religious experiences can be considered as the clue to our understanding of religions, as it puts us in touch with the soul of religions. It is difficult however, to say what religious experience is. Our ordinary experiences (perceptual experience, for example) can be identified easily since we can refer to the objects perceived. But we cannot identify religious experiences in this manner.

In order to find a way out of this difficulty we browsed through three of the classical studies in religious experience and with their help came to the conclusion that religious experiences are primarily integrative experiences that overcome the existential wrongness of human situations. This involves being in touch with a reality that is present in nature, but is not nature. But it is a reality that does not impose itself on us against our will.

2.7. KEY WORDS

Sui Generis: *Sui generis* is a Neo-Latin expression, literally meaning *of its own kind/genus* or unique in its characteristics. The expression indicates an idea, an entity or a reality that cannot be included in a wider concept.

Numinous: Numinous (from the Classical Latin *numen*) is an English adjective describing the power or presence of a divinity. The numinous experience also has a personal quality to it, in that the person feels to be in communion with a *wholly other*. The numinous experience can lead in different cases to belief in deities, the supernatural, the sacred, the holy, and the transcendent.

Mystery: A mystery is generally described as something that is difficult to explain or understand. But 'mystery' could also mean that which is known and unknown at the same time since the experimenter of a mystery is deeply involved in it without being able to objectify it, e.g., life, evil, etc.

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2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your progress I

1. Our understanding would be considered adequate if it identifies at least some characteristic features of religious experience in general. These features should be *general* enough because if we identify religious experience with Nirvana of the Buddhists, for example, we would be neglecting experiences that are typical of other traditions. Secondly, our understanding must pick out the typical of religious experience *alone*. In other words, it should not be so broad and general as to apply to other, non-religious experiences. If we identify religious experience with ecstasy and bliss, for example, such experiences might as well be induced by drugs and alcohol, but it may not have any features that religious people consider essential to religious experience.
2. When we think of religions the first thing that is likely to come to our mind are the temples, mosques and churches that dot our land. But when we think about them a little more we begin to realize that temples and mosques and churches are merely the tip of the icebergs that we call religions. It is merely one of the many observable, external aspects. There are also others. These external dimensions of religions can generally be brought under 4 Cs:
 - Creed (beliefs systems and doctrines),
 - Code (rules of conduct, some of which may even seem unethical to outsiders),
 - Cult (worship and adoration, *yajna*, and so on).
 - Community (some religions emphasize this dimension more than the others).

These visible, external, aspects of religions can be studied under various disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, history, sociology, psychology, and so on.

Check your progress II

1. An experience is an object or an event which enters into our consciousness. But a little more reflection would show that this definition is still not correct. Therefore we need to qualify our statement further by adding a third element to our definition of experience, namely directness. Experience, then, is direct or immediate awareness of an object or an event.

2. Schleiermacher had a deep personal sense of religion. Religious experience, for him, is the “integrative element of human life and culture”. It is a feeling of absolute dependence on something that is infinite, but manifesting itself in all that is finite.

Check your progress III

1. All these experiences make us aware of a twofold nature of reality: there is the natural world that we are ordinarily aware and something “more” than the natural world that comes to our awareness in these experiences alone. Secondly, there is some vague awareness about the nature of this sacred reality. Some call this Sacred Reality “God,” others call this One reality Brahman, still others find none of these substantive terms appropriate and therefore call it *Sunyata*. Thirdly, there is an awareness of the wrongness of a given situation and an overcoming of that wrongness by being connected to a larger reality that is hidden behind the natural covering. Fourthly, although we relied on spontaneous experiences that occur without any prior preparation so as to keep our understanding of religious experience broad enough, we should also be aware that most religious experiences do involve some prior preparation in the form of practices like yoga and meditation, regular prayer and interior silence, acts of worship and adoration.



UNIT 3: SOCIOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 General Introduction
- 3.2 Sociology of Religion
- 3.3 Psychology of Religion
- 3.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.5. Key Words
- 3.6 Further Readings and References
- 3.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we review the sociology and psychology of religion with a special emphasis on the contributions made by the world's most renowned sociologists and psychologists of religion. We examine the general characteristics of the sociology and psychology of religion to have a better grasp of the meaning and significance of religion in the world today.

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the concept of sociology of religion,
- Identify and put forward the main ideas of the major sociologists of religion, such as Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber,
- Understand the concept of psychology of religion,
- Identify and present the main ideas of the major psychologists of religion, such as William James, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.

3.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Religion is as old as humankind. It has been the subject matter of analysis and reflection right from the beginning of human history. It is an ineradicable part of human nature whose sources run much deeper than those of ordinary habits. There are, in fact, almost as many theories as there are religious thinkers, or thinkers about religion. Religion is concerned with a 'beyond', with man's relation to and attitude towards that 'beyond'. The human capacity for belief is limitless in effect. It is this capacity along with its striking diversity and strangeness of the beliefs and associated practices, which has stimulated the curiosity of many writers on religion, especially sociologists and psychologists. The following pages are an attempt to recapture the

theoretical legacy of several scholars in the field of sociology and psychology who made indelible marks in their analysis and assessment of religion.

3.2 SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

Introduction

The main nucleus of sociology of religion is the relationship that exists between religion and society. It is the study of the beliefs, practices and organizational forms of religion using the tools and methods of the discipline of sociology. Sociology as a discipline has been very intimately associated with the study of religion ever since sociology surfaced as a distinct field in the nineteenth century. The sociologists from the very beginning saw religion as a nearly inseparable aspect of social organization, a necessary window to understanding the past and present.

Sociology of religion is a scientific approach to religion, which tries to be empirical and objective. The fundamental concern of sociologists of religion is to further understanding of the role of religion in society, to analyze its significance and impact upon human history, and to understand its diversity and the social forces and influences that shape it. In their objective investigation of religion and society, they include the use of both quantitative methods (surveys, polls, demographic and census analysis) and qualitative approaches (participant observation, interviewing, analysis of archival, historical and documentary materials). Sociology of religion studies every aspect of religion from what is believed to how individuals act while in worship and while living out their declared convictions. The sociology of religion poses the question of the role and significance of religion in general, as well as that of understanding the beliefs and practices of particular groups and societies. Global religious pluralism and divergence, the nature of religious cults and sects, the power of religion on racial, gender and sexuality issues, and the consequence of the media and modern culture has on religious practices are all issues of interest in sociology of religion.

Some Sociologists of Religion

Many sociologists ensured religion an immortal place among the celebrated branches of sociology. Historically, the study of religion was central to the discipline of sociology with early influential figures such as August Comte, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. Though there were several sociologists of religion who made their indelible mark in history, we are going to study at least three of these eminent thinkers.

Auguste Comte (1798-1857)

Auguste Comte was a French positivist, sociologist and philosopher. He coined the term 'sociology' and found his new science equally as religion and as science. His famous works are *Positive Philosophy* and *Positive Polity*. Comte envisioned sociology not only as the queen of the sciences but also as the scientific basis of the new religion of positivism, which would gradually push all existing religions out of sight. He even tried to construct a religion of humanity in which historical figures are worshipped according to their contribution towards the society.

In his *Positive Philosophy*, Comte set out his law of the three stages which states that in the intellectual development of humanity there are three distinct stages, namely, theological, metaphysical and positive. In the theological stage, the thoughts and ideas about reality are essentially religious in nature. They are dominated by ideas that make reference to the supernatural. The overriding belief is that all things are created by God.

The theological stage is further divided into three sub-stages. The first sub-stage is fetishism, in which all things, even inanimate objects, are believed to be animated by a life or soul like that of human beings. For Comte, this fact underlies all religious thought and is perfectly understandable when seen in the context of early human development. The second sub-stage is polytheism where material things are no longer seen as animated by an indwelling life or soul. Matter is seen subject to the external will of a supernatural agent. The supernatural agencies are increasingly seen as not attached to specific objects, but as manifesting in all objects of a particular kind or belonging to a given category. A pantheon of gods and goddesses with power to affect the world and human beings is worshipped and propitiated. At this stage, priesthood emerges whose task is to mediate between the human realm and the gods. The third sub-stage is monotheism. The process which led from fetishism to polytheism leads logically on to the last of the sub-stage of the theological stage. It is characterized by the development of the great world religions and the emergence of distinct religious organizations such as the Church. From this monotheistic stage, human thought passes through the transitional metaphysical stage in which spirits and deities give way to more speculative conceptions of general principles or forces which rule reality.

The metaphysical stage is a transitional stage between the theological and positive stages. Natural phenomena are explained and understood by likening them to human behavior. They are seen as having a will and as acting intentionally. It is a belief that abstract forces like nature, rather than personalized gods, explain virtually everything. The third stage is the positive or scientific stage, dominated by the positive philosophy of science and industrial patterns of social organization, dominated by industrial administrators and scientific moral guides. In this stage, observation predominates over imagination.

Comte did not think that with the arrival of science, religion would disappear totally. According to him, religion was not only an attempt to explain and understand reality but also the unifying principle of human society. If a traditional religion were to vanish with the growth of science, it would have to be replaced with a new form of religion based upon sound scientific principles. He further states that since the science which is concerned with understanding the principles of social unity and cohesion is sociology, then the new religion would be a kind of applied sociology and the sociologist would be the high priest of this new secular creed. Comte was so serious about his opinion that he even devised the robes and vestments that the sociological priesthood would wear, the rituals they would perform and actually founded a Church of Positivism. Comte believed religion to be a product of reason and of the human capacity to generalize in an attempt to understand and explain the world.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)

Emile Durkheim is credited with making sociology a science, and is considered by many to be one of the founding fathers of sociology. His important works include *The Elementary Forms of*

the Religious Life, The Rules of Sociological Method, The Division of Labor in Society and Suicide: A Study in Sociology. Durkheim declared that religion originated in primitive man's absolute dependence upon his community and therefore his worship of it.

Durkheim defines religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, namely, things set apart and forbidden which unite into one single moral community all those who adhere to them. Religion, therefore, has a community dimension and it entails a congregation or Church. A basic distinction found here is between the sacred that includes all phenomena which are set apart and forbidden, and the secular or the profane. Sacred things are those things protected and isolated by prohibitions; while profane things are those things to which such prohibitions apply and which must keep their distance from what is sacred. The sacred is not defined by belief in gods or transcendent spirits. According to Durkheim, Sacred things should not be taken to mean simply those personal beings we call gods or spirits. A rock, a tree, a spring, a stone, a piece of wood, a house, in other words, anything at all, can be sacred. This disparity does not even necessarily correspond to the distinction between good and evil. In other words, sacred is not equal to good, and profane is not the same as evil. The list of sacred objects cannot be fixed once and for all; it varies from religion to religion. But Durkheim also admits that the profane may become sacred by means of rituals, and the sacred may become profane through erosion of values or dislocation of the deities. The erosion or disappearance of one set of the sacred is invariably followed by the appearance of new entities or states to which the sacred status is granted.

Religious practices or rites are central to Durkheim's conception of religion. He defines them as rules of conduct that stipulate how one must conduct oneself with sacred things. According to him, it is cults that enable believers to live and to act. In fact, anyone who has really practiced a religion knows very well that it is the cult that evokes these impressions of joy, of inner peace, of serenity, of enthusiasm, which the faithful retain as the experimental proof of their beliefs. The cult is not simply a system of signs by which faith is articulated outwardly. It is a collection of means by which it is created and periodically recreates itself. Thus, cults are cellular to religion and constitutive to society inasmuch as society would weaken without it. Even the gods would die if cults were not celebrated.

Max Weber (1864-1920)

Max Weber was an outstanding German classical theorist of sociology. Max Weber's scholarship in the world religions is proverbial. His most important works are *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (where he began his work in the field of sociology of religion), *Sociology of Religion* and *The Social Psychology of the World Religions*. He argued that religion was one of the non-exclusive reasons for the different ways the cultures of the West and the East developed, and stressed that particular characteristics of ascetic Protestantism influenced the development of capitalism, bureaucracy and the rational-legal state in the West.

Weber identifies three types of authority in the society: the charismatic, the traditional, and the national bureaucratic. The first is the kind of authority that emanates directly from the great individual, whether a Jesus in religion, a Caesar in warfare, or a Napoleon in war and government. Such authority is inseparable from the life of an individual. Often, as in Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism, the charismatic authority of the founder becomes 'routinized'. The

words spoken by the founder eventually become tradition, dogma, injunction and liturgy. The second type of authority is the result of cumulation through the centuries of certain sanctions or admonitions or simple ways of doing things originally prescribed by some leader of charismatic power. The third type of authority is a rationalized, calculated and a designed structure in which the office or function becomes crucial rather than the individual. Weber and his followers see a large part of history as involving the passage of authority from the charismatic to the traditional to, finally, the rational-bureaucratic.

Weber has a tendency to see religious development in terms of ethical rationalization. According to him, the increase of social complexity demands more laws and procedures. Such a need is met by the emergence of professional priesthood. Unlike magicians concerned with achieving concrete material results for clients, the concern of priests is with intellectual matters and with the elaboration of doctrine which generally involves the development of ethical thought. Weber's concentration was not on religion as a stabilizing power, but on religion as a source of the dynamics of social change. It is said that Weber spent much of his time studying religion. He tried to synthesize the insights of previous theoretical approaches in religion especially psychological and sociological. Weber made a distinction between magic and religion. According to him, magic is fundamentally manipulative and tries to intimidate gods and spirits, while religion involves worship of them. The gods and spirits of magic are more this worldly while those of religion are transcendental.

Conclusion

Religion is quintessentially a social phenomenon. Though religion has a private dimension, people experience religion in groups and movements. All the world's great religions have created and are sustained by large institutions. Religion is a fertile field for the study of deviance in the strict sociological sense. A kind of symbiotic relationship exists between sociology and religion. It should not be overlooked that in many areas religion, quite independently of currents in the social sciences, took on a strong social consciousness.

It is true that many of the founding fathers of the social sciences believed religion would wither in the face of rationality in the modern world. Further, some believed that it was the responsibility of the new social sciences to hasten that process. However, contemporary sociologists of religion generally make much more modest claims, than the founding generation. Through the study of sociology of religion, an individual is brought to the awareness of the enormous diversity of religious traditions; the tremendous impact of culture on religion; and the reciprocal impact of religion on culture.

It should be noted that the study of sociology of religion is not an attack on religion. The realms of the supernatural and that of values cannot legitimately be attacked by scientific tools. It is neither an investigation of whether or not religious ideas are true. Again, it is not an attempt to establish the significance or insignificance of religion.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer:

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What do you understand by the expression 'Sociology of Religion'?

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2. Comment on the contributions made by Auguste Comte in the sociology of religion.

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3. Comment on the contributions made by Emile Durkheim and Max Weber in the sociology of religion.

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3.3 PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

Introduction

Psychology of religion is the psychological study of religious experiences, beliefs, practices and activities. It should be observed that religion and psychology are not two parallel areas of human life. Psychology is an academic discipline, while religion is a blanket term signifying the way of life of individuals and communities, including doctrines, ethical codes, cultic practices and community organization. It is far more than a field of study and research. The two fields of religion and psychology are poles apart even in age-wise too. The major religions of the world have thousands of years of recorded history. Compared to this, psychology is a mere child. It began to develop as a distinct academic discipline just a century ago.

It is generally said that when psychology and religion congregate, there is always an understandable excitement in the air, since both fields touch human beings at their deepest core. However, it should be recorded that religion is not a major area of interest in psychology. Many textbooks of psychology do not devote much attention to religious issues. In some cases, the attitude is one of suspicion and even hostility. One is inclined to judge the prevailing attitude of psychologists toward religion as one of guarded detachment or mild hostility. A better understanding of the psychology of religion can be had when we examine the views of the leading psychologists on religion.

Some Psychologists of Religion

Though religion is not a major concern of psychologists in general, there have been influential contributions on religion by psychologists and its role in human life. Many psychologists of religion have examined the changing role of religion both in the public arena as well as in intimate interpersonal relationships. Given below are some psychologists of religion who have taken many an individual towards the path of excitement through their analysis of religion from a psychological point of view.

William James (1842-1910)

William James, an American psychologist and philosopher, is considered as the founder of the field of psychology of religion. He tried to emphasize the notion of the individual self or person as a continuous stream of 'consciousness' capable of exercising free will. James' important work is *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, which is regarded as a classic work in the field of psychology of religion. It was one of the first studies on religious experience by a psychologist. His other important works include *The Principles of Psychology*, *The Will to Believe*, *A Pluralistic Universe*, and *Some Problems of Philosophy*. James was convinced that there was something in human consciousness different from the particular sensations.

He made a distinction between institutional religion and personal religion. The institutional religion refers to the religious group or organization, which plays an important role in the ethos and culture of a society. Personal religion, on the other hand, is where one opens oneself to mystical experiences. James was most interested in understanding personal religious experience. In studying personal religious experiences, he made a distinction between healthy-minded and sick-souled religiousness. Those individuals who are predisposed to healthy-mindedness have a tendency to overlook the phenomenon of evil in the world and focus on the positive elements. On the contrary, those who are predisposed to having a sick-souled religion are unable to ignore evil and suffering, and often look for a unifying experience, religious or otherwise, in order to reconcile both good and evil.

William James arrived at some crucial and relevant conclusions after his thorough analysis of religious experience. First, irrespective of whether the theories of religion are true or absurd, religious life is humankind's most important function. A person's religion becomes the deepest and the wisest thing in his/her life. It brings people a great sense of power. Second, the personal value and passion of religious experience will not convince others, but as thinkers we need to study this phenomenon. Third, an impartial study of religions might sift out from the midst of their discrepancies a common body of doctrine. Fourth, religious experience gives people also a sense of there being something wrong with us and makes people want to reach out towards a higher reality. Finally, in the fifth place, there is a struggle in human beings between a higher and a lower, between a better and a worse part. People seem to glimpse something they call their 'real being'.

According to him, any belief must remain an individual process and we may rationally choose to believe some crucial propositions even though they lie beyond the reach of reason. He was of the opinion that if an individual believes in and performs religious activities, and those actions happen to work, then that practice appears to be the proper choice for that particular individual.

On the other hand, if the activities and processes of religion have little efficacy, then there is no rationality for continuing such practice, as far as that particular individual is concerned. For James, when the options of life are forced, then, human beings have a right to believe in something which is beyond the evidence.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)

Sigmund Freud was born to Jewish parents in the town of Freiburg, in Germany. He was a physiologist, medical doctor, psychologist and is considered as the father of psychoanalysis. He was interested in the study of religion throughout his life. He provided explanations of the genesis of religion in his various writings such as *The Future of an Illusion*, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, *Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays*, and *Totem and Taboo*. However, the doctrine on religion was only a minor part of his vast contribution. His major influence was in the field of psychoanalysis.

But within the purview of religion, Freud is known for his critique of religion. He did not even say that religious ideas are errors. However, he considered religions as 'illusions', because he believed they were the results of mere human wishes rather than of rational inquiry. When he spoke of religion as an illusion, he maintained that it is a fantasy structure from which an individual must be set free if he/she is to grow to full maturity. He defines an illusion as any belief, true or false, which is held not because there are good grounds for holding it but because there is a strong desire or need to believe it. Religion is a form of wish fulfillment or self-delusion which derives from an overpowering will to believe, a will which is stronger than reason.

Freud considered religious practices as neurotic. Religion was an expression of underlying psychological neuroses and distress. He saw religious ritual as similar to the obsessional neurotic behavior of patients who did things for no apparent reason. He believed in a sort of phylogenetic theory of religion by accepting a kind of patricide theory of some anthropologists. It is about the sons who kill their tyrannical father and later, smitten by remorse worship him. This is also known as the Oedipus complex, which, for Freud is the basis of societal and religious functioning. He was convinced that any type of authoritarian religion is dysfunctional and it alienates an individual from himself/herself.

Regarding the origin of religion, Freud remarked that when people feel frightened before the powers of nature, the following possible reactions could evolve: first, the humanization of nature wherein these powers are imagined to be powers like themselves; and second, giving these powers the characteristics of a father. Consequently, gods are created to exorcise the terror of nature and to reconcile human beings to the cruelty of fate especially death.

Carl Jung (1875-1961)

Carl Gustav Jung, a well-known Swiss psychoanalyst, is noted for his study of archetypes and the impact of religion on the individual's life. Archetypes are basic images that are universal which reappear regardless of culture. According to him, the collective unconscious is the storehouse of human experience which contains archetypes. The irruption of these images from the unconscious into the dominion of consciousness is the foundation of an individual's religious experience. His major work is *Psychology and Religion*.

As a psychologist of religion, he has influenced several branches of research, especially transpersonal psychology. Jung does not admit or deny the truth claims of religious doctrines. In other words, he regarded the question of the existence of God to be unanswerable by the psychologist and adopted a kind of agnosticism. According to him, what matters is the 'psychological truth' or a statement, that is, the part played by this belief in an individual's life.

In *Psychology and Religion* he says that no one can know what the ultimate things really are. One has to take them as one experiences them. If such an experience helps to make one's life healthier, more beautiful, more complete and more satisfactory to oneself and to those one loves, then, one can safely say: this was the grace of God. In his analytic psychology, Jung maintains that religion, which is an essential psychological function, symbolizes a deeper dimension of human existence, a vital layer of the psyche, recognition and integration of which are said to facilitate a harmonious and balanced human life. He further argues that it is the neglect of religion which would lead individuals into neurotic behaviour patterns, adversely affecting even the human species as a whole.

Conclusion

Psychology of religion is relevant in the sense that religion is very important for many people and secondly, religion and the life of an individual influence each other in an evident manner. Religious values influence their actions and religious meanings help them interpret their experiences. There are many more prominent psychologists who contributed much to the field of psychology of religion, such as Rudolf Otto, Erich Fromm, Erik H. Erikson, Gordon Allport, and Alfred Adler. Their contributions have taken this field of study into higher planes of human thought and practice.

One of the central focuses of psychology of religion should be individuals who must necessarily be balanced, integrated and religiously oriented. This challenges an individual to be open, tolerant, and constructive approach towards the religious reality. It should result in the process of integration or wholeness both at the personal as well as societal levels.

Check Your Progress II

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What do you understand by the expression 'Psychology of Religion'?

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2. Comment on the contributions made by William James in the psychology of religion.

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3. Comment on the contributions made by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung in the psychology of religion.
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3.4 LET US SUM UP

Most human beings on the face of the earth are religious by nature or by nurture with specific differences regarding the way they look at their particular faith traditions. Many are passionately involved in a divine centrality in their life and are ultimately concerned with moulding a life in accordance with its dynamics. Sociology and psychology play a vital role in the re-making of this divine centrality in the life of individuals. At the same time, it is becoming ever more apparent that religion has many strands and contradictory features. Religion has to be understood in newer categories in the present-day context. Keeping up with the new visibility of religion in different contexts of today is one of the central tasks of sociology of religion as well as psychology of religion. Another challenge that is placed before sociology and psychology is a careful analysis of the phenomenon of religion, at the same time, avoiding simplistic or reductionist explanations.

It should be noted that today, the ‘sacred’ flourishes anew and in varied forms. New religious movements make their appearance, ‘other faiths’ flourish along with the phenomenon of global immigration and movement, the New Age has its devotees, and ‘spirituality’ continues its bid to replace institutional religion as the way to move into the depths where the technological society cannot reach. Religion seems to be still mired deep in trouble. When, religion, human kind’s oldest and probably deepest concern, is willing to face the challenges and insights of sociology and psychology, the results can be expected to be abounding and contentious, challenging and profound.

3.5 KEY WORDS

Theology: Theology is the study of a religion based on God’s revelation accepted in faith.

Reductionism: Reductionism can either mean (a) an approach to understanding the nature of complex things by reducing them to the interactions of their parts, or to simpler or more fundamental things or (b) a philosophical position that a complex system is nothing but the sum of its parts, and that an account of it can be reduced to accounts of individual constituents.

Neuroses: Neurosis is a psychiatric term that refers to a class of functional mental disorder involving distress but not delusions or hallucinations, where behavior is not outside socially acceptable norms. It is also known as psychoneurosis or neurotic disorder. The term continues to be employed in psychoanalytic theory and practice.

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3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

1. Sociology of religion is basically dealing with the relationship that exists between religion and society. As a subject it refers to the study of the role of religion on society. It studies beliefs, religious practices and organizational forms of a society using the sociological methods such as surveys, polls, demographic and census analysis, interviews, participatory observation, analysis of archival, historical and documentary materials. From all these, we try to understand the role of religion in society, analyze its significance and its impact upon the shaping of human history. Sociology of religion, as a subject, also deals with issues such as the impact of religion on racial, gender and sexual discrimination, terrorism and religious pluralism.

2. Auguste Comte is a French philosopher, positivist and a sociologist. He is the one responsible for coining the term 'sociology'. He envisioned sociology to be the scientific basis for the new religion of positivism which according to him would replace all existing religions. He observed that human history would pass through three stages, namely, theological, metaphysical and positive in a gradational manner. In the theological stage, the thoughts and ideas about reality are essentially religious in nature. The metaphysical stage is a belief that abstract forces like nature, rather than personalized gods, explain virtually everything. The positive stage is characterized by scientific philosophy and scientific moral guides with a precedence given to observation instead of imagination.

3. Emil Durkheim and Max Weber are two sociologists of religion who have contributed much to the study of religion from a sociological perspective. Emil Durkheim is considered as one of the founding fathers of sociology. He considered religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things. According to him, religion has a community dimension and it is the society which determines what is sacred and profane. All the more, these so called gods determined by the community need not be permanent. For Durkheim, religious practices and gifts are important, because it is these cults that enable people to live, act and conduct themselves in the society. Durkheim is also considered as a person responsible for making sociology a science. Max Weber is an outstanding German sociologist of religion. He regarded religion as one of the non-exclusive reasons for the different ways the cultures of the West and the East developed. He considered religion to be in a process of evolution in which it moves from a charismatic stage through traditional to natural bureaucratic stage. The first stage emanates directly from a great individual whose words and deeds eventually become dogma, injunctions, liturgy and tradition for his followers. The second stage is the result of a cumulation down through the centuries of certain injunctions or admonitions originally prescribed by some leaders. The third stage is a rationalized, calculated and designed structure in which the office or function is given preference to an individual.

Check Your Progress II

1. The psychological study of religious experiences, beliefs, practices and activities is termed as psychology of religion. Psychology, as an academic discipline, is not very old in comparison to religion. Psychology of religion tries to interpret the psychological meaning and patterns of collective as well as individual religious contents and practices. It projects religion as something that should pervade the inner recesses of human life which influences the ethos of an entire people.

2. According to William James, the human person is a continuous stream of consciousness capable of exercising free will. He made a distinction between institutional religions (organized and structured religions) and personal religions where the individual opens himself / herself to mystical experiences. For him, religion should be meant for pragmatic purposes. In other words, if an individual believes in and performs religious activities, and those actions happen to work, then, that practice appears to be reasonable. If on the other hand, the activities and processes of religion have little efficacy, then there is no rationality for the individual in continuing such a practice.

3. Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung have tried to analyze religion from a psychological point of view in order to observe the contribution of religion on human behaviour. Freud was a strong critic of religion. He considered religion as 'illusion' – the result of mere human wishes rather than of rational inquiry. For him, religious practices were neurotic. According to him, religion could be traced back to the period when people felt frightened of the natural powers and started worshipping them under various names. Jung studied the impact of religion on the individual. He did not admit or deny the truth-claims of religious doctrines. He believed that in psychology and religion, no one can know what the ultimate things really are. For Jung, religion symbolized a deeper dimension of human existence and integration which helps to harmonize human life.



UNIT 4**RELIGIOUS PLURALISM**

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 The Reality of Plurality of Religions
- 4.3 The Marks of Plurality of Religions
- 4.4 Survey of Our Responses to Religious Plurality
- 4.5 Towards a Fellowship of Religions
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Key Words
- 4.8 Further Reading and References.
- 4.9 Answers to Check Your Progress.

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall try to arrive at the following objectives:

- We shall try to understand the phenomenon of religious plurality with a special reference to our country.
- We shall try to understand the impact of this phenomenon of religious plurality and its challenge for an adequate response.
- We shall try to understand some responses to the phenomenon of religious plurality.
- We shall try to propose 'pluralism' as an adequate response to the phenomenon of religious plurality.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Diversity is a lived experience. In our world, particularly in India, we experience diversity of religions, cultures, world-views, languages and customs. India is not only a 'melting pot' of diverse religions but a place of mutual interaction, dialogue and appreciation of everything plural that forms the fabric of our country.

In this unit, we focus our attention on the experience of diversity of religions in our world and in our country and try to understand how we can respond to this dynamic scenario that invites a responsible and creative response. Today people of every religion in the light of their experience of religious plurality are led to reflect on the question of diversity of religions. Why are there

many different religions? If God is one, why is there no one religion? How should these religions relate to each other? Yes! No one can escape this and other similar questions.

4.2 THE REALITY OF PLURALITY OF RELIGIONS

The Experience of Plurality

The experience of plurality is an undeniable fact. We, as beings-in-a world, experience ourselves as relating to a world that is embedded with rich and complex diversity. Within this complexity, we experience a great variety of religions. This experience of otherness of various hues and colours is inevitable and inescapable. We Indians are blessed with great model of unity in diversity. Our country has displayed an amazing ability of accepting and letting diversity flower. This diversity somehow manifests that there is no one meta-way of being an Indian. India has always been a home of diversity and has a rich tradition of harmonious living in a dynamic multicultural society. This characteristic openness to otherness is something our country shares with Asia, which is a continent that bubbles with multiplicity of cultures, plurality of religious traditions, languages and socio-political reality. Our country is a land of immense diversity. Her diversity, which emerges from geography, is reflected in her history and confirmed by the ethnography. Indian culture is therefore by definition a culture of multiplicities, a culture of differences. It may be said that our country not merely tolerates differences, but protects, fosters and celebrates diversity. There are more than 4000 different communities that make our country their home and this diversity extends to religions, languages, cultural practices, dresses, cuisine, levels of economic development, etc. What is ancient and what is most modern are to be found in India side by side. That is why we say that there are many ways of being an Indian. Hence, Amartya Sen says “In our heterogeneity and in our openness lies our pride not disgrace”.

Ethical Imperative of Plurality

The *anubhava* of plurality is inescapable. It challenges us to respond. On the one side there is a tendency of absorption, domestication, totalization, and homogenization of the other into our own categories. This means that the otherness of the other is often flattened down, rounded off its sharp, rough surface and reduced to the same.

Emmanuel Levinas, a French Philosopher, brings home this insight when he points out that the other is often totalized, and hence, the radical exteriority that characterizes genuine otherness is lost and the other is merely included within a totality. True otherness can only be experienced in a relation with a being beyond the totality. It is in the otherness, in the difference, in the plurality that we can experience the being beyond totality. Thus otherness, difference and plurality are the manifestation of the sacred. We might say that difference and plurality is divinely ordained. It is in the horizon of otherness that has to be respected, valued and discerned; we can notice an immanent order within the plurality of religions experiences. This is evident from our sacred writings in our country that welcome every otherness when they say “Let good thoughts come from all directions”. This ethos is grounded in a deep belief that every being belongs to the family of God (*Vasudeva Kuttumbakam*). This belief brings about a deep respect to all religions (*Sarva Dharma Samanvaya*) that is deeply enshrined into the secularism of our constitution. The deep sense of interconnectedness that is embedded in the Vedic teachings or the tribal experience of our people informs the *Dharma* of every Indian to work to build a nation which brings about

the welfare of all (*loksangraha*). This welfare is not restricted to humans alone, much less to a caste or class of humans. Thus, we can see that the bedrock of our nationhood is our openness to all beings.

The Experience of Plurality of Religions

The experience of plurality of religions is at the basis of every form of response to the phenomenon of multiplicity of religions. Ordinarily, we all tend to subscribe to a belief that the religion we adhere to enjoys the highest status in terms of truth and validity and so we seem to be unable to question our critic, re-think our tradition from within. As a result the other religions that we encounter are either refuted as mistaken or are interpreted in the light of the basic principles evolving from the religions of our adherence. This attitude often becomes responsible for separation, distrust and even warfare among religions. But today more and more enlightened humans have come to realize that it is a sort of self-impoverishment to refuse to learn from, differing ways of being human. Hence, our experience of plurality of religions teaches us that diverse religions are basic expressions of different ways of being human. In our country, it becomes a different way of being an Indian. There is no one way of being an Indian. Our unity in diversity is at the heart our nationhood.

Check your progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Is India's diversity a pride? Explain.

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2) Write a short note on religious plurality and different ways of being human

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4.3 THE MARKS OF PLURALITY OF RELIGIONS

Other Religions as Bridges

Often the other religions were perceived as boundaries and humans took upon themselves as their duty to guard the purity of their religions. A cursory glance of the history of religions reveals a painful narrative of religious violence. The claim of a particular religion to be the only true religion is among other factors that instigate and generate religious violence. Some analysts trace the roots of religious violence to the 'religious' following of the well-known theory of Rene-Girard who presents his argument with an analysis of the role of violence in the construction of human culture in general, and religious culture in particular. He teaches that violence is mimesis or the desire to have what another one has. This leads to rivalry and conflict. Since each one has desires violence threatens to pervade the group. At this time violence is

projected on a weaker person who is killed. She / he become a scapegoat and provide release from the feeling of violence. Thus, he views religious rituals which are often bloody, as safe detonation of the violent human impulse. Others view the phenomenon of religious violence as complex irrupting in particular circumstances due to many factors that are often extra-religious. These views refer to the abuse of religions for political as well as economic gains. But religions have great resource to building peace and harmony in a violence-ridden world.

Decalogue of Assisi

1. We commit ourselves to proclaiming our firm conviction that violence and terrorism are incompatible with the authentic spirit of religion, and as we condemn every recourse to violence and war in the name of God or religion, we commit ourselves to doing everything possible to eliminate the root cause of terrorism.
2. We commit ourselves to educating people to mutual respect and esteem in order to help bring about a peaceful and fraternal co-existence between people of different ethnic groups, cultures and religions.
3. We commit ourselves to fostering the culture of dialogue, so that there will be an increase of understanding and mutual trust between individuals and among peoples, for these are the premises of authentic peace.
4. We commit ourselves to defending the right of everyone to live a decent life in accordance with their own cultural identity and to form freely a family of their own.
5. We commit ourselves to frank and patient dialogue, refusing to consider our differences as an insurmountable barrier, but recognizing instead that to encounter the diversity of others can become an opportunity for greater reciprocal understanding.
6. We commit ourselves to forgiving one another for past and present errors and prejudices, and to supporting one another in a common effort both to overcome selfishness and arrogance, hatred and violence, and to learn from the past that peace without justice is not true peace.
7. We commit ourselves to taking the side of the poor and the helpless, to speaking up for those who have no voice and to working effectively to change these situations, out of the conviction that no one can be happy alone.
8. We commit ourselves to taking up the cry of those who refuse to be resigned to violence and evil, and we desire to make every effort possible to offer the men and women of our time real hope for justice and peace.
9. We commit ourselves to encouraging all efforts to promote friendship between peoples. For we are convinced that, in the absence of solidarity and understanding between peoples, technological progress exposes that world to a growing risk of destruction and death.
10. We commit ourselves to urging the leaders of nations to make every effort to create and consolidate, on the national and international levels, a world of solidarity and peace based on justice.

There is no doubt that religions have a great potential to develop peace and harmony. For instance, Christianity speaks of every human being as a child of God created in the image and likeness of God. Islam considers humans as vice-gerents of Allah. Hindus evoke the presence of the divine in the human in an *Advaitic* (non-dual) perspective, the Buddha nature latent in every

human being, and the Jains stand on the ground of *Ahimsa* or non-violence. These and other values flowering in our religious traditions have the great potential that can promote peace and harmony in our world. Hence, religions need to explore the possibilities of setting free these potentials for building peace and harmony. Inter-religious dialogue needs to become the order of the day at the service of peace.

Religions Serve Humans

We have seen that different religions are different ways of being humans in the world. Hence, the presence of difference, diversity, and otherness draws us to respond respectively and collaboratively. This calls for an attitude of openness and recognition of difference. The religious other is recognized, affirmed and accepted. This presupposes the acceptance of the right of the religious other to be (exist) and to be different. The theist tends to accept difference as divinely intended and as such cannot be domesticated, absorbed and erased into the same. Non-theists accept difference on the strength of the richness of diversity of reality as such. Yet there is religious intolerance springing in certain theists as well as non-theist religious circles. Fortunately, there is world-wide realization that our religious other is first of all a human person. Hence, any interaction whether favourable or unfavourable always takes place among people. It is always real flesh and blood human beings that engage in meaningful dialogue or mindless confrontation. Hence, it is of prime importance to realize that before we are Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Jains, and Sikhs, we are humans. This realization is deeply connected to the prospects of peace in our world. Therefore, inter-religious dialogue becomes an important weapon of building peace and harmony. Religious traditions that care for the well-being of society cannot fail to realize the crucial importance of harmony and understanding among the religious groups. Religious groups as social units wield power and their actions affect positively or negatively other religious groups or units in society. This means the fact of being religious does not force them out of the social sphere. Hence, religious traditions have a great responsibility of being self critical. This is often neglected as the religious traditions are engrossed in projecting their noblest images and doctrines. Hence, religious traditions have to conduct a realistic and genuine assessment of their actual state, and role they play or fail to play in the contemporary situation of a society. This will keep religious traditions in touch with actual life and everyday experience. It is only when we have religious traditions that are self-critical that our religions will promote *sarva-jiva-sukham*, happiness to all living beings.

The Irreducibility of Religious Experience

John Hick, a British thinker, relies on Ludwig Wittgenstein's discussion of family-resemblance and attempts to understand plurality of religions. Wittgenstein took the example of games to drive home his notion of family-resemblance. We have different types of games: ball games, card games, games played with sports equipments etc. Some are solitary, others are competitive, and others are played in turns. But all these activities are called games.

Hick derives from the above discussion a way of understanding religions. He says that the different religions form 'a complex continuum of resemblances and difference analogous to those found within a family'. The above concept of religion has its merits, but it might appear to do violence to difference and diversity that we notice among religions. Michael LaFargue and Mark Heim seem to overcome these pitfalls when they view religious faith as an experience of some good, and the experiences are distinctive in each religion. God, Nirvana, Tao, etc have

irreducible different meanings. Thus, religions are different systems of meanings built around such distinctive experiences. It is the diversity and irreducibility of religious experience that is the heart of plurality of religions.

Check your progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) How did Wittgenstein influence John Hick’s thinking on Religious pluralism?

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2) How do religions serve humans?

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4.4 SURVEY OF OUR RESPONSES TO RELIGIOUS PLURALITY

The experience of religious pluralism has evoked multiple responses across the world. Alan Race (1983), evaluating the Christian response to religious diversity, coined the threefold Typology: Exclusivism-inclusivism and Pluralism in his book, *Christianity and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in Christian Theology*. But this classification of the various responses has many limitations and one might trace them simultaneously among different members of the same community at the same time. Keeping this in our mind, we shall try to portray different approaches to religious plurality gathering them under four groups. The atheist/naturalist approach, the exclusivist approach, the inclusivist approach, and the pluralist approach.

The Atheist / Naturalist Approach

Hans Küng presents the position of the atheist views on both religion and religious diversity as ‘no religion is true. Or else: all religions are equally untrue’ Quinn takes reductive naturalism as an option by which he seems to explain away all religions as ‘products of merely human projection mechanism.’ Thus, he successfully reduces all religious diversity to non-religious factors. We can notice a naturalistic interpretation of religious phenomena in many western thinkers like Feuerbach, Freud, Durkheim and their successors. This naturalist/atheist approach manifests a clear bias against religion.

The Exclusivist Approach

The term ‘exclusivism’ is etymologically derived from the Latin verb *ex-claudere*, which means to shut out. Persons who hold exclusivism are those who believe that there can be only one true religion and that is ones own. We might trace doctrinal exclusivists or soteriological exclusivists among those who adhere to exclusivism. Doctrinal exclusivists are those who view that the doctrines of our religions are completely true and the doctrines of all others are false. Soteriological exclusivists view that only one religion offers effective path to salvation or

liberation. John Hick views such an exclusivist position as unfair, objectionable and opines that it stems from parochial egotism.

The Inclusivist Approach

The inclusivists present one tradition as having the final truth and are an effective way of salvation or liberation while other traditions, instead of being regarded as worthless or demonic are seen to reflect aspects of or to constitute approaches to the final truth or salvation. Among the Christians, this approach becomes an attempt to hold together the two axioms of 'universal salvific will of God' and 'salvation' through God in Christ alone. We can find this position among J.N.Farquhar, Karl Rahner, Gavin Costa and others.

The Pluralistic Approach

The pluralistic perspective maintains that all religions are equally valid paths to God / ultimate reality / the sacred or salvation. Pluralistic approach is greeted as the only adequate model for inter-religious relations. John Hick, Mark Heim, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Paul Knitter, Stanley J. Samartha, Leonard Swidler, Raimon Panikkar, are some of the important exponents of religious pluralism. Although each of them has one's differences yet all of them agree that different religions are diverse means of knowing and experiencing God/ the Really Real and / or ultimate liberation or meaning of life in a culturally, historically and linguistically conditioned manner.

John Hick, for instance, identifies the philosophical theory of religious pluralism as "the theory that the great world religions constitute variant conceptions and perceptions of and responses to the one ultimate, mysterious divine reality and within each of them independently the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness is taking place. Thus the great religious traditions are to be regarded as alternative salvific 'spaces' within which or 'ways' along which men and women can find salvation, liberation and fulfillment".

Mark Heim has a different approach towards religious pluralism. Mark Heim takes his religious pluralism to its logical conclusion. He states that all religions are real alternatives, with each having its own distinct religious fulfillment. Hick seems to propose that all religions finally serve one end. Mark Heim seems to propose that all religions serve multiple ends. Thus, Heim rejects 'unitive pluralism' of Hick. Unitive pluralism again is guilty of holding that there is one effective religious goal. This is achieved by somehow disregarding all the empirical and phenomenological elements of religions as extrinsic and accidental to the true, core and essential dimension that is somehow thought to be common to all religious traditions. Heim finds this homogenizing tendency of unitive pluralism not free from the hegemony of exclusivism or inclusivism. He says exclusivism, incluvisim and unitive pluralism are imperialistic. The difference is only in degree. He intends to recognize the integrity of religious traditions in their own terms. He finds that this approach can recognize the truth or validity as well as difference across the diverse religions. We have already seen that he has rejected the pluralistic theories that claim to transcend confessional particularity and provide a unique level of religious core common to all religions in a 'no-man's-land.'

Hence, Heim is modest in his claims. For him religious pluralism will have to be among other religious commitments and perspectives, and not above them. He bases his position on the views

of Nicholas Rescher and finds a theory that will somehow respond to religious pluralism adequately. Rescher calls his view as orientational pluralism in his work, *The Strife of Systems*. He rejects three possible philosophical responses to plurality: (1) one response he calls the 'unique reality view': reality has a determinate character and only one of the competing descriptions can be rationally adequate; (2) another response he calls the 'no-reality view': there is no ultimate reality or at least none that can be known. Therefore, philosophical truth-problems are pseudo-problems, which need to be reconceived, not answered or argued. The task of the philosopher is to lead people out of their bondage in this mirage; (3) and a third response is 'multifaceted reality view': each competing view gives truth, but none gives the whole. He quotes Good-man to make this point "there is no one way the world is, but there are ways the world is". The inadequacy of each view makes it possible for us to think that an all-inclusive view is possible to arrive through accumulation of all. Rejecting the three positions we have just discussed, Rescher advocates what he calls orientational pluralism. It accepts that one and only one perspective is appropriate from a given perspective, but we must recognize that there is diversity of perspectives. The distinctive thing about Rescher's view is that a practicing philosopher naturally proceeds by inclining to the unique reality view. Argument and inquiry can operate only from a perspective. From a given perspective there is ultimately one rationally defensible

Rescher advocates the irreducible plurality, and holds that perspectives cannot be combined. Heim recognizes orientational pluralism as the only authentic response to pluralism since it allows us to recognize a religious view as one among many and at the same time maintains its own 'universal claim'. This means orientational pluralism accepts the validity and universal claim of other religious tradition while at the same time upholding the preferable validity and universal claim of ones our religious tradition. Thus others are justified to hold views that are contrasting to ours. This is a kind of pluralistic inclusivism.

4.5 TOWARDS A FELLOWSHIP OF RELIGIONS

S. J. Samartha says that just after India's political independence in 1947, despite the fresh memories of how the country was fragmented on religious lines, in the constituent assembly, working on a constitution for the republic of India, there was a suggestion to erase the words "to profess, practice and propagate as a fundamental right of the minority communities. But one can notice an amazing spirit of broad-mindedness and a spirit of tolerance among the founding fathers of our constitution towards the minority communities. Hence, arrogant claims of normativeness of a single monolithic religious tradition are very much against the spirit of our constitution.

Religious pluralism is not just constitutionally upheld, it is also religiously dignified, especially by the Hindu mainstream religion in our country.

The Hindu (Vedic / Vedantic) view of religious pluralism could be summarized thus:

1. The One Absolute Reality is *nirguna* Brahman (beyond words and concepts, beyond *nama-rupa*, beyond knowledge and experience). Response to this reality is silence. Brahman is silence!
2. The highest metaphysical categories through which the One Absolute Reality is thought of are *sat-cit-ananda*. (*Saccidananda* Brahman is *saguna* Brahman). Response to this Reality is mystical realization of the oneness of Atman and Brahman.
3. When the One Absolute Reality is conceived as a Personal God, it is thought of as Father, Mother, Lord, Master, Creator, Preserver, Destroyer, All-knowing, All-powerful, etc. All religions can address the Ultimate Reality with these Personal attributes and yet know no division. Response to this Personal God is love, and loving surrender.
4. When the One Absolute Reality is given sectarian personal names, “individuation” takes place in the Ultimate Reality, or rather; division takes place in Human Consciousness regarding the One Absolute Reality. (E.g. Yahweh (Jew). Allah (Muslim), Shiva, Vishnu, (Hindu), etc.). This individuation gives rise to Religious Pluralism, each religion with its own ritual, myth, doctrine, ethics, social structures, and personal/mystical experience. Response to this Reality could be faithfulness and worship, tolerance and co-existence, respect and love for all.
5. The One Absolute Reality takes upon itself limitations so as to make it available to human beings: avatars incarnations, manifestations. Human beings build up Images, Statues, Idols, Sacred Places, Sacred Objects, Temples, Mosques, and Churches, etc. The Personal God takes more and more anthropomorphic character. Response to these Incarnations is in terms of worship and rituals, defensive and apologetic, emergence of sub-sects, ritualism, clericalism, etc.
6. When worshippers of the (i.e. when one religion tries to impose its theology, worship, image of God, etc. over others), intolerance and conflicts happen between Religions aiming at extermination of other gods and religions.

Hence, religious pluralism that we have seen above is mainly of inclusivist shape and form. Our country also exhibits the pluralist form of religious pluralism. The *Syad Vada* of the Jains is one important form that can generate plural religious pluralism. Pluralism has several values to a contemporary world.

1. It provides spiritual and cultural resources for the survival of different people in their search for freedom, self-respect and human dignity. When nations and peoples are politically dominated, economically exploited and militarily intimidated what else do they have for the survival of their spirit except their religions and cultures which can never be taken away from them?
2. A plurality of religions, cultures, ethnic groups and languages can be a guarantee against fascism because it will resist the imposition of any “one and only” religion or ideology on all people.
3. Pluralism introduces an element of choice by providing alternative visions of reality and ways of life.
4. Plurality provides multiple spiritual resources to tackle basic problems which have become global today. The availability of many resources to tackle these problems should not be looked upon with suspicion but accepted with gratefulness. People in mono-religious situations are becoming a little more pluralist.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

An adequate and human response to the phenomena of plurality is indeed urgent for the peace and harmony in the world. The peace in the world depends on the peace among religions. Hence, religious pluralism becomes an important way of dealing with our experience of plurality of religions.

Check your progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) How do exclusivists approach the concept of religious pluralism?

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4.7 KEY WORDS

Ethnography: Ethnography is a kind of writing that uses fieldwork to provide a descriptive study of human societies. Ethnography presents the results of a holistic research method founded on the idea that a system's properties cannot necessarily be accurately understood independently of each other.

Culture: Culture (from the Latin *cultura* stemming from *colere*, meaning "to cultivate") is most commonly used in three basic senses: 1. excellence of taste in the fine arts and humanities; 2. an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for symbolic thought and social learning; 3. and the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution, organization or group.

Parochialism: The term parochial can be applied in both culture and economics if a local culture or a local government makes decisions based on solely local interests that do not take into account the effect of the decision on the wider community.

4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your progress I

1) Our country is a land of immense diversity. Her diversity emerges from geography reflected in her history and confirmed by the ethnography. Indian culture is therefore by definition a culture of multiplicities, a culture of differences. It may be said that our country not merely tolerates differences, but protects, fosters and celebrates diversity. There are more than 4000 different communities that make our country their home and this diversity extends to religions, languages, cultures, practices, dresses, cuisine, levels of economic developments, etc. What is ancient and what is most modern are to be found in India side by side. That is why we say that there are

many ways of being an Indian. Hence, Amartya Sen says “In our heterogeneity and in our openness lies our pride, not disgrace”.

2) The experience of plurality of religions is at the basis of every form of response to the phenomenon multiplicity of religions. We might all agree that every religion has always been aware of its religious ‘other’ or that religions are plural or that there are other religions, other than one’s own. This consciousness of plurality has evoked diverse responses from various religions. Hence, the fundamental experience of plurality of religions becomes an imperative that generates authentic dialogical encounters as well as extremist fanatic exclusivist responses. This experience of plurality is indeed foundational because it poses very difficult and relevant questions. How can persons and communities with radically differing conceptions of the world, human life and God come to the understanding and appreciation of each others ways of being human? How with all our diversities, can we humans learn to live together peacefully and engage fruitfully in a complexly interconnected world? These questions are of special importance for us in our country and the response to them can build or destroy our nation.

Check your progress II

1) John Hick, a British thinker, relies on Ludwig Wittgenstein’s discussion of family-resemblance and attempts to understand plurality of religions. Wittgenstein took the example of games to drive home his notion of family-resemblance. We have different types of games: ball games, card games, games played with sports equipments etc. Some are solitary, others are competitive, and others are played in turns. But all these activities are called games. Hick derives from the above discussion a way of understanding religions. He says that the different religions form ‘a complex continuum of resemblances and differences analogous to those found within a family’. The above concept of religion has its merits, but it might appear to do violence to difference and diversity that we notice among religions.

2) Different religions are different ways of being humans in the world. Hence, the presence of difference, diversity, and otherness draws us to respond respectively and collaboratively. This calls for an attitude of openness and recognition of difference. The religious other is recognized, affirmed and accepted. This presupposes the acceptance of the right of the religious other to be (exist) and to be different. The theist tends to accept difference as divinely intended and as such cannot be domesticated, absorbed and erased into the same. Non-theists accept difference on the strength of the richness of diversity of reality as such. Yet there is religious intolerance springing in certain theists as well as non-theist religious circles. Fortunately, there is the world wide realization that our religious other is first of all a human person. Hence, any interaction, whether favourable or unfavourable, always takes place among people. Hence, it is of prime importance to realize that before we are Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Jains, and Sikhs, etc., we are humans.

Check your progress III

1) The term ‘exclusivism’ is etymologically derived from the Latin verb *ex-claudere*, which means to shut out. Persons who hold exclusivism are those who believe that there can be only one true religion and that is one’s own. We might trace doctrinal exclusivists or soteriological exclusivists among those who adhere to exclusivism. Doctrinal exclusivists are those who view that the doctrines of our religions are completely true and the doctrines of all others are false. Soteriological exclusivists view that only one religion offers effective path to salvation or

liberation. John Hick views such an exclusivist position as unfair, objectionable and opines that it stems from parochial egotism.



BLOCK -2 INTRODUCTION

India is the land of religions; for Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism have their origin in this country. **Hinduism** is one of the oldest religions of the world and still influences the life of over 80 % of our nation, 400 millions in South Asia and the Indian migrants in other parts of the world. During its long history of 2500 years the original **Buddhism**, originated in India, has given birth to several schools and traditions. Nevertheless all of them claim to be derived from the same root, namely from the Enlightenment of the Buddha rather than from his person. To know this common source, therefore, we must first understand the life of Buddha in this land. **Jainism** is one of the oldest religions of the world, originating on the Indian soil. Jainism has a rich history not only because of its continuity of existence for over 2500 years in India, but also because of its unique contributions to Indian philosophy, logic, mathematics, art, astronomy and literature. Its special emphasis on ethical purity, religious tolerance, spiritual contentment, ecological protection is all of topical relevance to today's society all over the world. And in Punjab, **Sikhism** originated at a time when there was complete disintegration not only social and political but also moral and spiritual. People were deeply engrossed in the observance of petty ceremonies, rituals and dogmas. The second block, consisting of 4 units, provides a student with a bird's eye view of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism.

Unit 1 on "Hinduism" attempts to understand the Hindu religion in all its complexities. First, the unit makes a review of its historical development so as to comprehend the identity of Hinduism despite its diversity of beliefs and practices. Next in the unit we learn about its sacred scriptures, ideas on God and human destiny. Finally the unit examines its ethical teachings too.

Unit 2 highlights "Buddhism" as a religion. First, the unit aims at grasping the significance of Buddha's life. Next the unit tries to get at the core of his teachings: 'The Fourfold Truth' and 'The Eightfold Path,' the Buddhist idea of human destiny and its ethical teachings, and the key scriptures of Buddhism in the context of its historical development.

Unit 3 studies "Jainism" covering the key features of a religion that has come down to us right from the pre-Aryan antiquity. It has given the world some unique doctrines in philosophy. First, the unit overviews the historical development of Jainism. Next, the unit identifies the basic Jain scriptures and beliefs, and then tries to understand the Jain idea of salvation and finally learn the ethical teachings of this ancient religion still practiced by a vibrant minority.

The last Unit, "Sikhism," focuses its attention on the origin and development of Sikhism through the successive ten Gurus. The unit also elaborates the structural as well as conceptual framework of the Sikh Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib and its cosmopolitan vision. Here the ethical aspects of Sikhism, ethical code of conduct, status of women and contributions of Sikh women to spirituality will be discussed. To elaborate the practical implications of Sikh teachings, the role of Sikh institutions will be analysed along with the description of Sikh ceremonies, rituals and festivals.

The above given 4 units will give you an introductory understanding of religions of Indian origin which are the related religious traditions that originated in the Indian subcontinent inclusive of their sub-schools and various related traditions. They form a subgroup of the larger class of

“Eastern religions.” These Indian religions have similarities in core beliefs, modes of worship, and associated practices, mainly due to their common history of origin and mutual influence.



UNIT 1 HINDUISM

Contents

- 1.0.Objectives
- 1.1.Introduction
- 1.2.Hindu Scriptures
- 1.3.God and Human Salvation
- 1.4.Hindu Ethics
- 1.5.Let us Sum up
- 1.6.Key Words
- 1.7.Further Readings and References
- 1.8.Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0. OBJECTIVES

In this unit we want to understand the Hindu religion in all its complexities. We will first learn about its sacred scriptures, ideas on God and human destiny. Finally we will examine its ethical teachings too.

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify the key Scriptures that contain the Hindu beliefs and practices
- Describe the principal ways God and human destiny are understood in Hinduism
- Examine the relevance of ethical teachings of Hinduism

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions of the world and still influencing the life of over 80 % of our nation, 400 millions in South Asia and the Indian migrants in other parts of the world. Yet it has neither a founder-figure nor an organizational system. There is no creed defined as essential to it. It is so diverse in its beliefs and practices as to manifest the vast regional variations of the Subcontinent: geographical, climatic, ethnic, and linguistic groupings. Yet it has preserved its identity. This identity cannot be explained in terms of the common origin of beliefs in this land. For, religions like Buddhism and Jainism also have originated in this land, and have grown as religions in opposition to it. It was precisely in confrontation with them that Hinduism has developed its **self-awareness**. Again it was in the context of its encounter with other religions that it has also made its **self-affirmation**. Anyway the fact is that Hinduism has organically evolved like a single mainstream over its long life of over 4000 years.

The archaeological findings of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa have suggested that the earliest religion in the Subcontinent was centred on male god seated in a yogic posture surrounded by animals. There are certain clues to female figures and phallus-like stone objects. All these obviously indicate the cult of Shiva which perhaps was to loom large into later Shivism.

What is undisputable is that when the Aryan communities came to the Subcontinent from the northwest about 1500 BCE they found a striking contrast with the natives of the soil that they referred to them as 'Dasus', having darker skin, defending themselves from forts, worshipping phallus etc.. However, in course of time, a two-way process of interaction took place between the invading communities and the indigenous people. A hybrid kind of religious moorings began

to develop over a long period until c 500 BCE. It was this new Indo-Aryan religion that was later called Hinduism. The earliest evidences of the Hindu religion are found in a vast number of hymns orally transmitted over six centuries (c1400 BCE – 800 BCE) called the **Veda** (literally meaning ‘knowledge’). They are the first Scriptures of Hinduism.

1.2. HINDU SCRIPTURES

The sacred scriptures of Hinduism are classified into two sets of literature: The **Sruti** and The **Smrti**

The Sruti Literature

The term ‘Sruti’ literally means “what was heard”. Vedas were what the highly spiritual people (Rshis) heard and orally passed on to the posterities. They were all ‘the revealed and the eternal’ truths. As such, therefore, they have primary authority. There are five kinds of Sruti literature: (i)Vedas, (ii) Brahmanas, (iii) Aranyakas and (iv)Upanishads.

The Vedas

The earliest literary manifestation of the Hindu religion are traced to a vast number of hymns orally transmitted over six centuries (c1400 BCE – 800 BCE). Eventually they became an exceptional body of sacred literature, called the **Veda**, because the ‘veda’ literally means ‘knowledge’, and to the orthodox Hindu they are the eternal words (vac), self-existent truths, constituting the divine revelation. They are ‘apaurusheya’, not human creation. The Rshis (seers) just ‘heard’ them through direct intuitive insight and transmitted them orally in the form of Mantras (chants) to the later generations who were destitute of this insight. Still later generation, lacking the power of oral communication, compiled them in three main collections (Samhitas) : *Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda* and to which a fourth was later added by a sage by name *Atharvan*. Thus there are fourfold Vedas, of which the most important and the earliest collection is the Rig Veda (‘Royal knowledge’).It consists of hymns addressed to one or more gods, usually personifications of natural powers like Varuna deva (rain), Vayu deva (wind), Indira deva (thunder) Surya deva(sun), Usha devi (dawn). The Yajur and Sama contain sacrificial chants, and the Atharva Veda, mostly magical spells.

Brhmanas are mostly prose works appended to the Vedas, explaining the procedures of sacrificial rituals. The householder was enjoined to make different types of sacrificial rites to get their desired benefits. The basic belief was that the supernatural powers had to be appeased so that they would properly fulfil their roles. In this connection the law of karma (the law of causation) was first mentioned in the sense that such and such a sacrifice would produce such and such an effect.

Aranyakas are ‘Forest Books’ composed by those who had renounced the ritualistic sacrifices at home and gone to forests to live in favour of meditation. They focus on internalization of sacrifice enabling one to develop one’s ascetic practices. Some of them also contain mystical and philosophical speculations. Such portions are called Upanishads.

Upanishads: are philosophical and the mystical utterances secretly given by a guru to the disciple who sat (sad) down (ni) near (upa) to him, enabling him to experience the human self (atman) as Brahman, the Supreme Being. They came to be regarded as the core of the Vedas, and so were

called the 'Vedanta' (the end of Vedas). The philosophy taught in the Upanishads is also called Vedanta.

The early religious quest directed to the outer world resulted in the varied gods in the Samhitas. They themselves were reduced to One Brahman (Supreme Being) in the Brhmanas. But what is Brahman was the central question of the Upanishads. Meanwhile the Aranyakas attempted to reassess the ritualism of Brahmanas. Now the Upanishads take this up with full vigour, redefining the law of karma. The karma is no more restricted to ritual action nor directed to appease the outer power pervading the universe. But it is extended to every action of life and is directed to an inward journey to realize one's self, the Atman. But what is still more significant is the discovery by the still later Upanishads that 'that Brahman is this Atman' (*tat tvam asi*). These ideas would have enormous impact upon the later religious thought of Hinduism.

The Smriti Scriptures

The term 'Smriti' literally means "that which was remembered", and so it refers to tradition. Therefore, they have only secondary authority, in so far as they are in accordance with the Vedas. They include:

- i. The two Itihikasas or Epics (Ramayana and Mahabharata)
- ii. The Puranas (sacred chronicles with lot of legendary romances)
- iii. The Dharma Shastras (codes of law)
- iv. The Darshanas (philosophical schools)
- v. Agamas (manuals of worship).

Itihikasas: While the Vedas are for the learned, the two Epics (Mahabharata and Ramayana) are considered to be scriptures for the common people. **Ramayana** is centered on the one theme of depicting the noblest of human beings in and through a concrete exemplar of King Ram.

Mahabharata is the longest poem in the world, consisting of over 70,000 stanzas. It is a rich encyclopaedia of popular devotions couched through numerous stories and mini-stories, woven around the central narrative on the war of succession between two branches of a royal family.

Bhagavad Gita: Though it forms a part of Mahabharata, it is essentially complete in itself. For all religious purposes it has been regarded as a separate scripture of Hinduism. In fact it has been the most influential of scriptures in Hinduism.

It is given as a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna. Just before the outbreak of the Mahabharata war, Arjuna is perplexed by the consequences of killing his own kith and kin in the war. Krishna persuades him to overcome his reluctance. Briefly put, the ethical point is that as a warrior he has the duty to fight to fulfil dharma, unaffected by desire or regardless of its results to him and in faithfulness to God. Ritual action and knowledge are set forth as legitimate and mutually reinforcing paths, but incomplete unless integrated within and subordinated to bhakti. In the course of the teaching, a theistic form of religion is presented incorporating the ideas of other traditions like the Yoga, and answering to the stance of other religions like Buddhism.

Puranas are chronicles of gods, heroes, sages and kings, full of legendary stories, wild exaggerations. The thrust of them all is to popularize the highly abstract thoughts of Hinduism in a concrete way, to explain to the masses the Hindu way of life, the Hindu ideals and to educate them on the Hindu philosophy of life. The Vedic gods are replaced by new Trimurthi gods and their consorts and offspring.

Dharma Shastras are the collection of various laws pertaining to regulation of political, religious, and social aspects of Hindu life. There arose separate manuals for each of the goals, each developing it with a lot of technical interpretations. Thus the Arthashastras by Kautilya dealt with pursuit of material property and power (artha). The Kamasutras of Vatsyaya elaborated the goal of love or desire (kama). Manu Smriti treated the laws belonging to the different castes (dharma). And the goal of moksha was developed by the six Darshanas.

Darshanas are the philosophical systems to elaborate the Upanishadic ideal of Moksha which was summarized in mnemonic formulae, called **Vedanta Sutra**. As such they required the use of commentaries for understanding them. In fact all the six schools of Indian philosophy are commentaries on the Vedanta Sutras which they took as authoritative. The first four of them, though claim loyalty to the Vedas, are quite independent of it. But the last two are primarily rooted in Vedanta sutra and hence are called Vedanta schools. (You have already learnt about them early in 1.1)

Agamas deal with worship forms, the temple-structure, etc. There are three classes of Agmas in relation to the three major sects of Hinduism. The Pancharatra Agamas are the Vishnava scriptures that glorify God as Vishnu. The Saiva Agamas glorify God as Shiva and have given rise to special school of Philosophy Saiva Siddhanta. The Shakta Agmas are the Tantras that glorify Goddess cult.

Check your progress I

- Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Distinguish between the Hindu scriptures called Sruti and Smriti

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2. Why is Bhagavat Gita regarded as the most influential scripture of Hinduism?

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1.3. GOD AND HUMAN SALVATION

By the time of Puranas, the Aryans had been conquering not only the many local kingdoms but also been absorbing their deities into their religious framework. But this assimilation of gods did not take place simply haphazardly, but with certain underlying principles, and with practical implication for salvation. Our concern in this part of the lesson will be to describe the process of doctrinal tolerance about God, enunciate the principles underlying that process, and to explain its implication for salvation.

Process of Assimilation of gods

Already the Aryan communities came also with their own gods as the Rig Veda in one place mentions thirty three gods, in another place it declares that 'three hundred and three thousand

thirty nine gods worship Agni'. Over and above it, each of the diverse racial groups that existed across the Subcontinent had its own gods or goddesses, its own rites and ceremonies and its own ways of obtaining salvation. And as they went on conquering the local kingdom they also absorbed their gods too. But the whole process was taking place in some systematic way so that eventually it gave rise to the doctrine of the Hindu trinity (Trimurthi): Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

- The Upanishadic discovery of the all-pervading sacred power of the cosmos as the impersonal immanent reality of Brahman, is now relegated to the background and is represented as a personal god as Brhama, with human qualities, having creation as his main function.
- Vishnu, a minor god of Vedas, is now syncretised with various existing deities, with a totally new identity as a benevolent god, concerned for the welfare of the world. He is said to periodically descend into the world. Ten such descents (avatars) described: first as a **Fish** in order to deliver the Vedas from the demons, next **Tortoise** to sustain the world on its back, then as a **Boar** to raise the earth when it was dragged by a demon, then as a **Man-Lion** to put down the pride of demonic man, then as a **Dwarf** to put down the self-conceit of even a benevolent man. **Parasuraman** to destroy the militant and arrogant Kshatriyas. The ideal king and noblest of human beings is represented in the form of **Rama** by Ramayana. The importance of **Krishna** is brought out in Mahabharata, combining his pastoral eroticism, military exploits, and a dying god. Then **Buddha** is also seen as the incarnation of Vishnu, probably with a view to adopting it into Hinduism. The final one is yet to be expected.
- Shiva, originally a pre-Aryan god of South India, now identified by the Puranas with the Vedic god Rudra, is depicted as a fiercer figure, symbolizing both the creative and destructive aspects of deity. The creative aspect is seen in the chief symbol of lingam and as lord of dance (exuberant mode of self expression). as loving, as grace-bestowing, as a great ascetic, meditating on the Himalayan Mount, Kailash, as fearsome destroyer of evil, as one who frequents cremation grounds and other frightening places, as the Lord of beasts.

Another remarkable development is that the divine energy of the threefold gods was also seen as distinct female deity. Thus Goddess-worship also emerged, representing each member of Trimurthi with a consort:

- Brahma's consort was Saraswati, differently called Sarada (giver of essence, Vagishvari (mistress of speech) Brahmi (wife of Brahma) Mhavidya (supreme Knowledge), Lakshmi of Vishnu, and Parvati of Shiva. Each one having numerous names too.
- Lakshmi is the consort of Vishnu, variously called Sri, Padma or Kamala, Rukmini, Haripriya, Jaladhija, Lokamata
- Shiva's consort was Parvati, variedly called Uma, Ambika, Haimavati, Gauri, Girija, Daksayani, Mrdani, Rudrani, Sarvani, Aparna, Maheswari, Kumari, Varahi, Indrani, Chamundeswari.

Eventually the 'Divine Power' the Shakti was personified as Goddess as such. It was even recognized as primal matter embodied in the universe yet beyond it, enabling the role of the trimurti yet higher than the gods, causing the joys and miseries of this world and also liberation from it.

The Underlying Principles

There are three characteristically Hindu principles underlying the assimilation process that went on for centuries in Hinduism and that gave the doctrinal tolerance about God:

'Ekam sat, vipra bahudha vadanti': The bewildering diversity of gods and goddesses did not confuse the Hindu mind, nor was the hesitation to assimilate them all as true. For, there was a profound insight of the sages that "Reality is one but the wise speak of it in different ways". It was with this insight only that the Hindu mind was able to accommodate the varied local deities its framework. Without losing its own original spiritual intuition it was able to assimilate the conflicting ideas or clashing interests of local communities, and their confusing details of customs, rites and ceremonies into a unified whole.

The principle of **adhikara** says that spiritual fitness or competence is varied from person to person. Thus the abstract notion of God as a Spirit both immanent and transcendent will be no good to a person whose mind hungers for concrete gods and therefore who does not have spiritual competence to imbibe it.

The third principle of **istadevata** says that out of the numerous forms of God conceived in the past, and recorded in the scriptures, no one is forced to select a particular god and worship him in a particular way. Everyone is free to choose one's own god or goddess which satisfies one's spiritual longing; one is also free to choose the pattern of worship. The main concern of Hinduism is not about how many gods there are or what kind of dogma or worship-pattern one must follow. Rather it is only concerned about whether the god or goddess you have chosen is helpful in your search for meaning in life.

Hindu Idea of Salvation

Corresponding to the doctrinal tolerance about God (we have explained just above), Hinduism proposes a doctrinal tolerance about salvation too. Each one can follow any god and any path of salvation. The principal paths to salvation are three: Jnana Marga, Karma marga and Bhakti marga.

Jnana Marga grants that anyone may use any image of God, even a gross and concrete form of God. But it insists that one gradually grows from material images to mental images and from the various mental images to the one personal Ishvara and from the personal Ishvara to the impersonal Absolute. Further, as against the meaning of karma by the Branhmanas 'the right performance of the sacrifice' Upanishads used the word karma to mean any action of life, having the potency to determine one's future. The evil action will attain an evil womb while the good action a good womb. This process is repeated and thus the soul is subject to perpetual bondage or 'samsara' ('sam' meaning together, 'sar' meaning flow) or the endless cycle of births and rebirths, the conditions of each birth being determined by the acts (karma) performed during the previous life. Thus, since action only leads to further action and hence it alone cannot lead you to the release from this bondage (moksha), the Upanishads upheld that the only means of escape from samsara is the attainment of knowledge (jnana) of Brahman and experiencing the self as one with Brhman. That Realization or the Knowledge is precisely the Attainment of salvation. The realization of the Absolute itself may be either an 'all-excluding Absolute' or as 'all-inclusive Absolute'.

- The idea of the all-excluding Absolute is there when the self (atman) identified with

Brahman is seen as not having any attributes and is described by negatives *neti, neti* (not this, not this). One is said to be in ‘*avidya*’ if one regards the name and form (*nama-rupa*) of things as real and gets attached to them.

- The idea of all-comprehensive Absolute is there means that Brahman-atman penetrates the world so much that all names and forms are seen merely as modifications of the One. *Avidya* here means the failure to experience one’s immediacy with the That (*Tat tvam asi*).

Karmayoga insists on action (*karman*). In both Vedic and Mimamsaka senses the *karman* meant *yajna* or a ritual action, performed with a view to getting one’s personal desire. However, in the sense proposed by Gita the action meant performing of one’s duty without any personal desire, but simply as in a sacrifice to the benefit of the world and by surrendering all actions to God. In this sense, for a soldier, even killing, done in the war, without any personal desire, to the benefit of the world, may be meritorious.

Bhakti marga, on the contrary, sees ritual action and knowledge as legitimate and mutually reinforcing means, but incomplete unless subordinated to *bhakti* and integrated with it. Action needs to be done unaffected by desire or regardless of its results to him and in faithfulness to God. The knowledge of God in the sense of experiencing the identity of *atman* with Brahman is impossible unless it is coupled with *bhakti*. Thus, *bhakti* is not so much as a path to salvation as salvation itself.

Thus, these are paths of salvation recognized. What suits one will have to be decided by each and adopt it and attain salvation.

Check your progress II

- Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. State the key principles underlying the Hindu reconciling the diversity of gods and goddess with unity

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2. How does *Bhakti* precede over *Jnana* and *Karma* in obtaining one’s salvation?

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1.4. HINDU ETHICS

The human personality in Hinduism is seen as complex entity with fourfold aspects:

- The natural instinctive desires
- The craving for property and power
- The social relationship

- The spiritual urge.

Accordingly, a fourfold goal of human life is set for the integrated personality:

- Aesthetically beautiful expression of one's natural desires (*kama*)
- Lawfully acceptable acquisition of material prosperity and power (*artha*)
- Socially appropriate organization of duties (*dharma*)
- Spiritual pursuit of one's own attainment (*moksha*).

These fourfold ends of human life are called the Purushartas (literally, meaning to the human) and form the basis of the Hindu ethical teachings. They are usually put in a single formula: "Dharma- artha- kama-Moksha" which sums up the whole of ethical teachings of a Hindu life. The Righteousness (*dharma*) of life consists in directing our passions (*kama*) and possessions (*artha*) to a spiritual end (*moksha*).

Apart from this general morality implied in the formula, mentioned above, Hinduism had already produced during the time of its classical synthesis a terse formula of what it called **Varnashrama Dharma** having implications for one's personal ethics and social ethics. The one part of the cryptic formula, viz. **Ashrama dharma** defines the personal ethics of a Hindu life while the other part of it '**Varna dharma**' defines the Hindu social ethics.

The personal ethics of an individual is organized into four stages (ashramas)

The student's phase (Brahmacharya) demands one to learn one of the Vedas. It starts with the rite of initiation. After it, one is expected to apply oneself diligently to one's studies, to live celibate life and to honour one's teachers as one would one's parents. At the end of one's career as a student one is given a ceremonial bath to signify one's competence to assume the responsibilities of the householder.

The Householder's life (Grahasta) requires him to perform domestic rituals of the Brahmanas to get his desired benefits. It starts with marriage and is governed by the caste restrictions. What is basically emphasized is the sacredness of marriage, and a perfect union of husband and wife in all respects (biological, psychological, moral and spiritual), loyal devotion to each other until death. The householder must not be absorbed merely by the day to day affairs, cares and concerns of life. On the contrary he has to look upon his home as a trust which has come down to him from his forefathers and which he has to carry forward to posterity. This spiritual continuity is symbolically expressed by the sacred fire which is kept burning in the house. Further he is enjoined with five-fold duties:

- An offering to gods (e.g. a stick to the sacred fire) - to express his dependence on God
- Daily offering of waters to the forefathers, remembering his past
- Offerings to men (as a sign of his hospitality)
- Offering food to other beings (to share his possessions to the needy)
- Daily recitation of the Vedas (as a source of inspiration and of spiritual nourishment)

The Forest dweller's life (Vanaprastha) entails him to follow the teachings of the Aranyakas, internalizing the sacrificial rites. It starts when the householder, after living a full and fruitful life, throws off his family ties and withdraws from active life and other active role of leadership in his family, and devotes himself to the study of scriptures and religious practices.

The life of renouncer (the Sanyasi) necessitates him to live life of complete renunciation and solitude with the only aim of realization of spiritual freedom or mystic union with the divine, by cutting oneself of all “I” and “mine”.

The Social ethics of Hindus was summed up in the *varna dharma*. The Hindu society is divided into four main classes:

- Brhamana (the priestly & teaching class)
- Kshatriya (the warrior and ruling class)
- Vaisya (the agricultural and commercial class)
- Sudra (the serving and labourers’ class)

The major castes are four: the Brahmans or the priestly or teaching class. The Kshatriyas or the warriors or ruling class, the Vaisyas or the traders and agricultural class the Sudras the labourer’s class service sector of society. These divisions normally regulate diet, clothing, religious practices, marriage and occupation.

The first three castes undergo initiation and thus become ‘dwija’ (twice born). Apart from the four there is what is called the outcaste - the ‘avarna’, originated back in the times when certain groups were barred on purely magic-ritualistic grounds from participating in the communal rituals, condemned to suffer all legal, social and religious disabilities to which a low caste Hindu is normally subjected and at the same time they are denied the few advantages which would have accrued to them in their regular caste system.

The most complete and detailed picture of this social pattern with its ramifications was formulated by Manushaststras written about 2nd century BCE. Today it is impossible to accept them as valid norms of the changed life pattern of society. The cause of caste system must have been either that the pre-Aryan communities had certain distinctive concepts of taboo, pollution and purification expressed in their religious rites or that the invading Aryans must have organised their social life mainly on certain magic-ritualistic concepts, the impact of which on the pattern of life of the indigenous Indian communities must have helped the growth of castes on the basis of graded functional guilds protecting the occupations of the members of their society. However, it has been degenerated at a particular point of time so as to encourage discriminations of people by birth. This is totally unjustifiable. Realizing this, many leaders like Mahatma Gandhi have clearly denounced it as a ‘blot’ on Hinduism, an ‘abscess’ to be cut and thrown, poisonous virus to be eliminated. The Constitution of India itself has affirmed that State shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds only of religion, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.” It also affirms that “Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden”. With proper education and cultivation of heart, and due economic uplift the discrimination of people on the basis of caste is bound to be erased. Already during these years one can see a lot of improvement.

Check your progress III

- Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Enunciate the general principle of Hindu ethics

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2. What is Hindu social ethics? Discuss its relevance to the present day context.
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1.5. LET US SUM UP

The unique feature of Hindu religion is its ability to accommodate with and even to assimilate the plurality of beliefs and practices without being merged with any of them. In the context of its encounter with diversity of cultures and religions, Hinduism has organically developed its self-identity.

The Vedas for a Hindu are sacred scriptures of primary importance, because they contribute to the attainment of the goal of human life. Additionally one also regards other literary collections that recount either the actual or mythological cases of attainment, or those writings while accepting the authority of the Veda offer philosophic, ritualistic or prescriptive explanation regarding the exemplars of attainment.

The Hindu idea of God is accommodative with any number of conceptions, as expression of the one all-pervading sacred power. This ultimate principle of the universe is seen to be identical with the transcendental dimension of human existence. Our human consciousness is tainted by a veil of ignorance such that we are not able to perceive this deeper dimension or the ultimate state of Being, Consciousness and Bliss. Hence, the real goal of life consists in attainment of that ultimate state of being. Whatever idea of God one finds suitable to realize that goal or whatever path one finds beneficial is accepted provided that one reaches the ultimate goal of life.

The ethical teachings of Hinduism have been graded according to the graded phases of one's personal life or the graded structures of society. In the course of its long history many aberrations have come about. But the attempts to set them right have come about not so much from the central authority of power or hierarchy as from illustrious lives of saints and sages. The authority itself understood only in terms of internal competence for self-realization and not by the external power of any sort.

1.6. KEY WORDS

Dharma: The term 'dharma' (Sanskrit: *dharma*, Pali *dhamma*), is an Indian spiritual and religious term, that means one's righteous duty or any virtuous path. It literally translates as *that which upholds or supports*. In Indian languages it contextually implies one's religion. **Dogma:** Dogma is the established belief or doctrine held by a religion, ideology or any kind of organization: it is authoritative and not to be disputed, doubted or diverged from.

Ritualism: Ritualism refers to an overemphasis on the rituals and liturgical ceremonies of a religion.

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1.8. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

1 The Hindu scriptures are distinguished between two classes of its literature: *Shruti*, meaning “what is heard”, or the divinely revealed truths, pre-existent and self-existent. The seers who had the extraordinary insight to perceive those eternal truths grasped them and transmitted to the posterities orally for many centuries. *Apurusheya*, not of personal authorship and so having no human imperfection; as such they had the primary authority and importance.

Smrti literally means ‘what is remembered. Actually it refers to tradition. All the scriptures under this category proclaimed the authority of the Vedas. Having done that their function was just to clarify the obscurities, if any, of the Veda or to explain through illustrations either through historical or mythological (Epics), or through unbelievable stories (Puranas), or through argumentation (Darsanas) or through prescriptive literature (Dharma shastras). The claim that *smrti* texts need not contradict the Veda left their authors with great freedom in pursuing new formulations.

2. Though Gita forms a part of Mahabharata, it is essentially complete in itself. For all religious purposes it has been regarded as a separate scripture of Hinduism. In fact it has been the most influential of scriptures in Hinduism. Though its teachings seem to be ethical in its import it is theistic in its approach. It enjoins the warrior who has the duty to fight to fulfil dharma, unaffected by desire or regardless of its results to him and in faithfulness to God. Ritual action and knowledge are set forth as legitimate and mutually reinforcing paths, but incomplete unless integrated within and subordinated to *bhakti*. Thus it reconciles the three ways of salvation into one synthesis incorporating the ideas of other traditions like the Yoga. At the same time it answers the stance of other religions like Buddhism. Above all, it is a path open to all classes of people, not merely to the people of higher castes.

Check Your Progress II

1. The first principle 'Ekam sat, vipra bahudha vadanti' (Reality is one but the wise speak of it in different ways) helped people to accommodate the conflicting ideas of local deities into unity. Secondly, the principle of **Adhikara** that spiritual fitness or competence is varied from person to person enabled varied people to take to varied concepts of god suitable to their own temperament and competence. Thirdly, the principle of **istadevata** gives the right to choose one's own god or goddess which satisfies one's spiritual longing and, out of the numerous forms of God conceived in the past, and recorded in the scriptures. One is also free to select the pattern of worship

2. Action, if it is not to lead to further action, needs to be done unaffected by desire or regardless of its results to oneself, but only to the benefit of the world, and in faithfulness to God. This is precisely the meaning of *bhakti*. Likewise, the knowledge of God in the sense of experiencing the identity of *atman* with Brahman is impossible unless it is coupled with *bhakti*. Thus, *bhakti* takes precedence to action and knowledge. *Bhakti* is not so much as a path to salvation as salvation itself.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. The general principle which sums up the whole of ethical teachings of a Hindu life is the one that enunciates the fourfold end of human life pertaining to the pursuit of material, psychological, moral and spiritual "*Dharma- artha- kama-Moksha.*" The Righteousness (*dharma*) of life consists in directing our passions (*kama*) and possessions (*artha*) to a spiritual end (*moksha*).

2. The Social ethics of Hindus is represented by Varna dharma. The Hindu society is divided into four main classes: Brhamana (the priestly and teaching class), Kshatriya (the warrior and ruling class), Vaisya (the agricultural and commercial class) and Sudra (the serving and labourers' class). Whatever be the historical role the Varna dharma played, it cannot be encouraged today. Keeping the overall framework of categorization of society according to various professions, the discrimination between people on the basis of birth must be rooted out.



UNIT 2 BUDDHISM

Contents

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- 2.1 Introduction
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2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we are going to study Buddhism only as a religion. For this, first we need to grasp the significance of the Buddha's life. Next we will try to get at the core of his teachings: 'The Fourfold Truth' and 'The Eightfold Path'. Then we will grapple with the Buddhist idea of human destiny and its ethical teachings. Finally we will identify the key scriptures of Buddhism in the context of its historical development.

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Grasp the significance of the life of the Buddha as a new Path-maker
- Appreciate his Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path
- Grapple with the meaning of Nibbana
- Learn the ethical teachings of Buddhism
- Identify the key Scriptures as well as the kinds of Buddhism

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Buddhism does not believe in personal God or substantive soul, as other religions would normally do. It also avoids all dogmas and theology. It is purely based on a religious sense to experience all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity. It suggests special kind of human destiny according to which he channels its teachings of morality, meditation and wisdom. Moreover, Buddhism is known for its adaptability to different cultures. Its concern has always been to impart simply its spiritual practices to people. It has never interfered with local cultures or original beliefs of peoples. Hence, it has easily spread to most countries of Asia and remains as a powerful cultural force. It has become popular in the West, too, since the late 19th century. It has been classified as one among the four 'universal religions' of the world.

2.2 THE BUDDHA

'Buddha' is not a proper name but a descriptive title meaning 'The Awakened' or 'The Enlightened'. He was born of Suddhodana, a petty king (chieftain) of the Śākya clan, in Kapilavastu on the border between Nepal and India, around the year 563 CE. His original name was Siddhartha Gautama. Gautama was his clan name. Siddhārtha meant "one who has achieved his aim".

Earlier Life

Little is known about the early life of the Buddha. The Buddhist scriptures do not give his life in a continuous narrative. They have preserved some specific events from his life. Some of them are probably mythical in nature. At the time of his birth, an astrologer had prophesized that he would become either a great king or a monk. Obviously his father wanted his son to succeed him. Therefore, all precautions were taken to raise the boy in the luxurious environment of the palace. And at the age of 16, he was married to Yaśodharā. After 13 years of married life he fathered a son, Rahula.

Soon after the birth of the son, the prince Siddhartha took out a journey by chariot. There he was deeply disturbed by the sight of an elderly man, helpless and frail. Secondly, he saw a diseased man, emaciated and depressed. Thirdly, he spotted a family grieving at the death of their son. As he was reflecting deeply upon the suffering brought about by old age, illness and death, he came to see a religious mendicant who led a life of meditation, calm and serene.

Inspired by the last sight, Siddhartha decided to follow the path of the mendicant and to find a spiritual solution to the problem of suffering. He left his wife, child, lavish lifestyle, and future prospects. It was not out of despair that he renounced all this. It was expected that he enjoyed the greatest happiness in his palatial life. Yet at the sight of the threefold sufferings of life, he recognized that no matter how great one's indulgences in pleasures of the senses might be, one would have to eventually face these sufferings, early or later. It was the recognition of this fundamental truth of human life that moved him to renounce the household life. Of course the fourth sight of the mendicant inspired him to seek enlightenment for the sake of the whole of humankind.

Great Renunciation

When he decided to renounce, it was final. After taking a last look at his young wife and infant son, he mounted on his horse and rode out of the limits of the sleeping city. He left the horse and sent the charioteer back to his father with his royal ornaments and a message. On the following morning, he cut off his hair. He exchanged his royal dress for a hunter's garb and became really a mendicant in search of the supreme ideal. This event was later called the Great Renunciation. He was 29 years old at that time.

Seeking Enlightenment

The princely ascetic first tried meditation techniques from two teachers. He felt that these were valuable skills. However, meditation could not be extended forever. Eventually he had to return to normal waking-consciousness and face the same unsolved problems relating to birth, sickness, old age and death. So, concluded that meditation was inadequate.

He then joined a group of like-minded Brahmins in a forest near Gaya where he practiced intense fasting for six years, only eating the bare minimum. This technique produced a series of physical discomforts. Ultimately, he rejected this path also. He realized that he had to reject the extremes of the mortification of the flesh just as he had rejected the life of worldly enjoyment. He found that the "Middle Way", avoiding extreme austerity and enjoyment, a way largely defined by moderation and meditation, would lead to enlightenment.

Attaining enlightenment

One night on the full moon day of the month Vaisakh, he sat underneath a large Pipal tree – later known as the Bodhi tree, not to rise till he had attained enlightenment. He experienced some major spiritual breakthrough. The conflict between the human passions (symbolized by 'Mara' Satan, Darkness or Ignorance) and spiritual powers (Enlightenment or Wisdom) was finally resolved during that night. He ascended one by one four stages of trance (*dhyana*). The last stage was marked by pure consciousness and equanimity. It was at that stage that he felt that all the evil passions (craving, desire, hatred, hunger, thirst, exhaustion) which are at the root of people's suffering had been overcome. All fears, doubts, and delusions about the future destiny were at rest. He had progressed beyond 'spiritual defilements'. He had attained enlightenment!

After his enlightenment

After the Enlightenment, the Buddha spent seven more weeks there under the sacred pipal tree, henceforth known as the Bodhi (enlightenment) or simply tree, enjoying the peace and bliss of Bodhi, the Enlightenment. For seven days, he puzzled over his future: whether to withdraw from the world and live a life of seclusion, or whether to reenter the world and teach his Middle Way. Finally he decided to proclaim his teachings to other humans so that they could also attain enlightenment. He was to go forth to preach the new saving doctrine. The Mara tempted him to disappear into nirvana without concerning himself with the tedious task of preaching to people and founding a religion. The Buddha rejected this selfish suggestion. The Teacher took himself to the holy city of Benares on the river Ganges to preach the doctrine.

There the Buddha met the same group of five Brahmin ascetics with whom he had earlier fasted in Gaya. After some initial hesitation they welcomed him and quickly realized the transformation that had taken place in him. Now he proclaimed himself a Tathagata' (the one who has attained what is really so) or "The Buddha" and preached the first sermon at Saranath, near Varanasi. The

first sermon is preserved as a discourse (Sutta) called ‘Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dharma’. All the five accepted his teachings and became his disciples. They were ordained as monks (Bikkhus) in a simple ceremony. After the Buddha’s second sermon, all the five achieved enlightenment too. The news spread quickly and soon a large number of people began to follow the Buddha. Some 60 of them attained enlightenment. They were all now called Arhants (saints) and were charged to go forth as missionaries and spread the teachings out of compassion for the world. On his part, the Buddha went about teaching around Northeast India covering a “territory some 150 miles long by 250 miles wide.”

Gradually the number of followers increased. He had such a large public following and thousands of disciples, including women, that he established the order of monks (Bikkhus) and equivalent order for nuns (bhikkhunis). His wife Yaśodharā became the first nun. All the Buddhists put together came to be known as the Sangha. As his popularity increased and the number of his followers swelled, residential centers became established at which monks would remain for part of the year, notably during the rainy season when travel was difficult. Often these residences were donated by kings or wealthy patrons and in due course they evolved into permanent institutions known as Viharas or monasteries.

After forty-five years of teaching, Buddha died at the age of 80, apparently of natural causes. He did not choose a successor. He felt that the Sangha governed by his Dhamma (his teachings) and the Vinaya (his code of rules) would be sufficient.

Check Your Progress I

- Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What are the four instances of life that happen to be a turning point in the life of Prince Siddhartha?

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2. Elucidate the “Middle-Path” of the Buddha

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2.3 FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The core of Buddhism is the Buddha’s teaching on the Four Noble Truths. In fact his very first sermon consisted of them only. They also prove to be summary of the Buddha’s teachings, both from the point of view of doctrine and also from the point of view of practice. They may be described in simple terms as follows:

- (i) The Truth of Misery (Dukkha)
- (ii) The Truth of the Cause (Samudaya)
- (iii) The Truth of Cessation (Nirodha)
- (iv) The Truth of the Path (*Marga*)

The Truth of Misery (Dukkha)

It is plain truth that suffering is an intrinsic part of life. It pervades the whole of our life. It is real, not illusory. It is of two broad categories. There is first the physical or biological experience of pain. Birth itself is a suffering and is the gateway for other sufferings like disease, old age and death. Then there are the mental and psychological forms of suffering: distress arising out of separation from our loved ones, loss of things or people, grief over torture or persecution, failures or frustrated desire, the impermanence of pleasure. Thus physical and mental sufferings are woven into the fabric of our existence. Not that there is no joy and happiness at all in life; but they are all short-lived. Suffering dominates life.

The Truth of the Cause (Samudaya)

There is a cause for suffering. In unfolding this cause Buddha says that the primary cause is desire or craving (Trishna or Raga). We all enjoy good food. We want more and more of it. Just because you are fond of a particular food, you may eat it again and again. But you get bored with it. Then you try another kind of food. You enjoy it. But again you get bored with it. Thus, though you may like to prolong such pleasant experience, yet we are never completely satisfied. Our craving is un-ending.

The Truth of Cessation (Nirodha)

So the only way to put an end to suffering is to put an end to both desire and ignorance. Thus it is possible to put an end to suffering. With cessation of suffering the mind can enjoy the final liberation, *Nibbana* (in Sanskrit 'Nirvana').

The Truth of the Path (Marga)

But, how to put an end to both craving and ignorance? This is precisely being worked out in the Eightfold Path.

2.4 EIGHTFOLD PATH

As it is obvious from the name, the Eightfold Path is the Way that consists of eight components. They should not be taken as 'stages' meaning that we go over them one by one in succession and that while climbing one you leave the other behind. Rather they are different aspects of a total view of life and therefore they must all be cultivated together on a continuing basis. They are all organized for transformation of intellectual, moral, and emotional restructuring of oneself.

Right View: According to Buddha, there is no 'I' as such. What we think as self is not a permanent, independent reality. The 'self' is only a convenient name for a 'collection' of processes like feelings, perceptions which are ever-changing, dependant and contingent, just as there is no 'forest' apart from trees. It is mere 'ignorance' that we think of a permanent and independent self as opposed to things around us or persons opposed to us.

Right Thinking: Thought has immense influence on one's behaviour. If you want to be morally good, you should first think that it is necessary to do good and avoid evil. To remove ill-will, you need to think lovingly and kindly and cultivate compassion. To cultivate compassion you must

think of the essential equality of all living beings and their right to be happy. If you go on cultivating such thoughts you will have eliminated greed and anger, purified yourself of those three defilements and set the path for attaining freedom or Nirvana.

Right Speech is an extremely important part of human life. We often tend to appreciate the power of speech. But we may often neglect the need to control our power of speech. By cultivating the right speech one will achieve greater harmony in society. The faculty of speech should be used constructively in order to promote meaningful communication, to unite and encourage rather than destructively abusing others.

Right Action entails respect for life, respect for property and respect for personal relationship. The principles of equality and reciprocity are applicable especially to this realm of action. Right action also involves respect for property, in the sense of not stealing from others, or cheating. Finally, right action means respect for personal relationship, and avoiding adultery, sexual misconduct and male exploitation of women, etc.

Right Livelihood is extension of the previous step. It is right action applied to oneself, seen as a breadwinner in society. It means that one ought not to earn one's living in such a way as to violate these principles which are the underlying principles of good conduct for the welfare of others.

Right Effort here means undertaking our task with energy, enthusiasm, confidence and a firm determination to carry it through. But, of course, effort must be controlled and be balanced, not to be too tense nor too slack, just like the string of a violin which should neither be too tight nor too loose.

Right Mindfulness means full awareness and total attention, avoiding a distracted and clouded state of mind, so as to increase one's efficiency and productivity.

Concentration is focusing the mind fully on a single object (which may be physical or mental) to the exclusion of all other thoughts, distractions, wavering agitation or drowsiness.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What are the Four Noble Truths enunciated by the Buddha?
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.....
.....

2. Express the Eightfold Path in a nut-shell.
.....
.....
.....

2.5. BUDDHIST IDEA OF HUMAN DESTINY

The idea of life after death is differently conceived in different religions. Buddhism teaches that humans are trapped in a repetitive cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. This is a vicious circle. The one goal of human is to break this cycle and experience complete liberation from suffering by putting an end to desire, the cause of suffering. That attainment, called in Buddhism Nibbana (Nirvana), is indeed the human destiny.

Buddha's discovery of Path began from his analysis of the conditions of human existence which is marked with three main characteristics:

dukkha, meaning ills, sufferings, misery, evil, etc;

anicca (or *anitya* in Sanskrit), the impermanent or transient quality of all earthly things, especially the so called 'pleasures' of life;

anatta (or *anatman*) absence of a permanent or enduring self within the human individual, as against the usual conception of an eternal element within human.

Of the three features mentioned above, the first point is the overall feature which arises as a result of the other two. *Anicca* is the first intuition on which the Buddha's teachings rest. The things that we see about us, tree, tables, mountains, rivers, etc., seem to be permanent. Since, all is subject to change, there is no fundamental substance called soul. What appears to be lasting and permanent is an ever changing compound, a ceaseless succession of physic-mental states, a mere aggregate or composite of the changing states of being

Now, from both *anicca* and *anata* is derived the *dukkha*. Since there is no fundamental self whatever it experiences is bound to be unsatisfactory (*dukkha*). Unsatisfactory-ness comes from desire which comes from ignorance (*avidya*). The end result is suffering and despair.

The one and the only goal of Buddhism is to remove suffering from life and give a taste of supreme bliss (*Nibbana*) to human beings. It is precisely to reach that destiny that the Buddha gave the Eightfold Path. To practice the Path it is not necessary for people to become a monk or a nun, although the monk's life may be the ideal for practice. Being a monk also may not mean anything if one does not practice the Path.

2.6 ETHICAL TEACHINGS OF BUDDHISM

Morality in Buddhism is like the foundation of the Spiritual path. Morality makes manifest of one's innate Buddha nature. The overcoming of *dukkha* is its central preoccupation towards which ethical action contributes. It is in the nature of things that behaving ethically reduces suffering and increases happiness for oneself and others. Thus, moral life is proposed not as a burdensome duty or set of 'oughts' but as uplifting source of happiness in which sacrifice of lesser pleasures facilitates the experiencing of more enriching and satisfying ones.

The importance of morality is explained in Buddhism with a simile. The earth is the base of all animate and inanimate things: be it the buildings, mountains or rivers, or be it tree or bush, or

animals everything rest on the earth. So also morality is the foundation of all qualities, all virtues and all attainments, ranging from the worldly success to the supernatural achievements, or any skills like meditation or wisdom and enlightenment. If this moral foundation is not set properly one will succeed in going over to other stages of the Eightfold path.

Another general characteristic of Buddhist morality is that it is based on a democratic principle: All living beings want to live, enjoy happiness and security. They all fear suffering and death. This is true of all living beings just as it is true of ourselves. This is what is called the universal vision of equality of Buddha. On the basis of the equality follows the next principle of reciprocity. Just as we would not like to be killed, robbed, abused and so forth, so would all other living beings not like to have these things happen to them. To put it simply: "Do not act towards others in a way which you would not want them to act towards you."

To be specific, there are three kinds of precepts prescribed as means of cultivating Sila (virtue).

(i) 'Five Precepts' (Punchasila) to be observed by all, monks and laypeople alike; (ii) 'The Eight Precepts' (Asntanga Sila) to be observed by the novices who are preparing for monastic life; and (iii) 'Ten Precepts' (Dasa sila) to be observed more rigorously and on a long term basis according to the status of the practitioner or to suit a particular occasion.

The Five Precepts (Punchasila):

1. "Not harming" living beings (Non- violence)
2. "Not Taking what is not given" (Non- stealing)
3. "Misuse of sensual pleasures" (complete celibacy for monks and nuns; for the lay persons, adultery or any sexual harassment is forbidden).
4. "Avoiding false speech" or gossip (Non-lying)
5. "Unmindful states due to drinks or drugs" (The main concern here is that intoxicants cloud the mind. Some have included anything that divorces us from reality, e.g., movies, TV & the Internet.

The Eight precepts (Astanga sila) include the following three in addition to the five already mentioned above:

6. 'Avoidance of eating in unreasonable time'
7. 'Avoidance of dancing, singing, music, watching grotesque mime'
8. 'Avoidance of wearing garlands, perfumes and ointment and personal adornment'

Ten Precepts (Dasa sila) include the following two in addition to the eight:

9. Avoiding 'Use of high seats or luxurious beds'
10. Avoiding 'Accepting gold or silver'

The above mentioned precepts are all negative in as much as they prescribe what ought to be avoided. But they need to be complemented by the positive content that is already given in the eightfold Path.

2.7 SCRIPTURES OF BUDDHISM

The Buddha gave his teachings in the form of discourses (*Sutta*). He spoke not in Sanskrit, the language of the priestly class, but in dialect close to *Pali*. Three months after his death, one of his most accomplished students, the Venerable Mahakassapa, assembled 500 senior monks in what was to be called the First Council. It was held in Rajagriha, Magadha. Their goal was to give the Buddha's teachings a degree of permanence and consistency by converting them to written form for use by the *Sangha* (the Community of Buddhists). The inner meaning of the life of the *Sangha* was expressed in the songs of the early monks. They were called the 'Songs of the Elders' *Theragatha* by monks, *Therigathi*, by the nuns.

In that First Council itself, certain differences arose in the *Sangha*. Some conservatives claimed to follow the teachings of Buddha in their 'ancient' or 'primordial' (*Thera*) form. As against them, a new movement arose which was more overtly innovative with an emphasis that it should be open to the concerns of the lay people. This led to the division of Theravada school and the new Mahayana (Greater Vehicle).

The division became as sharp as to lead into a schism in the Second Council which was held a century after the first, in Vesali. Seven hundred arhants (enlightened followers) were present. A few conservative Elders of the council felt that discipline within the *Sangha* needed tightening and that the Buddhist religion had to be focused on meditation and concentration, to be pursued primarily by monks in monasteries and that the lay people's task was only to support the monasteries. They were to be encouraged "to engage in merit-making activities to improve their future rebirth status." But a group of monks, the Vajjians, argued that the emphasis on monastic life would imply that lay people could scarcely hope for salvation. So the Ten Precepts should be relaxed in a such a way that it could be practiced by the "common people." They also wanted lay people to have equal representation.

The Vajjian monks were outvoted, and left the council to form a different Buddhist tradition. That is how the Mahayana Buddhism (Greater Vehicle) came into existence. The innovative spirit of the Mahayanists was so vibrant that for many centuries Indian Mahayanists continued to compose new scriptures, extending the implications of the earlier teachings. These non-Theravadin scriptures (Sanskrit Canon) are still existing in Nepal in fragments and preserved in Chinese and Tibetan translations. The Mahayana scriptures were composed from around first century BC originating as written works in Sanskrit. Though many of them are attributed to the Buddha their form and content clearly show that they were later re-statements and extensions of the Buddha's message. The main sources for our understanding of Mahayana teachings are the very extensive Chinese and Tibetan Canons.

The traditionalists denied the new literature the value of scripture as Buddha-Vacana'. But validity was established through various devices: Firstly, they were seen as inspired utterances coming from the still existing Buddha, through meditative visions and vivid dreams. Each explanation saw the Sutras as arising from meditative experiences. Nevertheless they take the form of dialogue between the historical Buddha and his disciples and gods. Above all the new Sutras were seen as turning of the new wheel of Dharma, deeper level of teaching than the early Suttas. This new perspective on scriptural legitimacy led to the Mahayana having an open ongoing 'revelation' which produced a huge outpouring of a new Sutras in India around

650CE. They were all composed anonymously often by a number of authors, often elaborating basic text.

Theravada Buddhism (the “Doctrine of the Elders”) later spread from northern India to Sri Lanka and most of Southeast Asian countries like Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, mostly thanks to King Ashoka. He organized the Third Council involving 1,000 attendees, in the third century BCE. Under his leadership, Buddhist monks were sent into neighboring countries; thousands of stupas and monasteries were built. Then the Fourth Council was held during the first century BCE in Sri Lanka. It was during this Council that the Theravada Buddhist scripture (The Pali Canon) was given a formal shape. It was all recorded on palm leaves and passed intact to the present day. Its name is derived from the Pali language in which the scriptures were written. Today, they would fill several thousand pages.

As a result there are two types of scriptures for Buddhism. The Mahayana scriptures, previously written in Sanskrit and preserved in Chinese and Tibetan translation. The Pali Canons of scriptures, written down in Sri Lanka around 80 CE in Pali language, a dialect close to that spoken by the Buddha, derived from the early Sangha’s transmission of earliest material, agreed on at several councils.

The Buddhist scriptures (the Pali Canon) originally comprised an enormous mass of literature that was compiled over several centuries. It was divided into three main parts, called Tripitaka (literally, basket) (meaning three collections of religious texts

Sutta Pitaka: It contains the core teachings of Buddhism. Sutta literally means discourse. Divided into five groups called Nikayas or Agamas. The last of them contains the commonly known texts:

- *Dhammapada*: collection of important religious and moral saying;
- *Theragatha*: collection of religious poems composed by the Buddha’s disciples themselves. It is all in old *prakrit* language, but a portion of a Sanskrit version is included.
- *Jataka*: collection of birth stories some of which are moral fables full of wisdom and humour.

Vinaya Pitaka: It consists of mainly rules governing the daily life of monks and nuns. This contains instructions on the organization of the Sangha and how to keep the sangha working harmoniously.

Abhidhamma Pitaka: (*Abhidharma* in Sanskrit) is higher and advanced formulation of Buddhist teachings. It seeks to avoid some of the inexactitudes of colloquial conventional language as is sometimes found in the Sutta. It gives a precise and detailed description of the "principles behind the mental and physical processes of the Buddha’s teaching" and states everything in psycho-philosophical language, expressing the ‘ultimate’ (*paramattha*) teachings.

Check Your Progress III

- Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Distinguish between the two types of Buddhist scriptures

2. Indicate the main divisions of the Pali Canon

2.8 LET US SUM UP

Buddhism provides many opportunities for dialogue with a diverse range of subjects. For example, dependent origination can be considered one of Buddhism's contributions to philosophy. Additionally, Buddhism's emphasis on the Middle way not only provides a unique guideline for ethics but has also allowed Buddhism to peacefully coexist with various other religious beliefs, customs and institutions in countries in which it has existed throughout its history. Also, its moral and spiritual parallels with thought of other religions — for example, with various tenets of Christianity — have been topics of immense interest.

2.9 KEY WORDS

Enlightenment: In Buddhism, enlightenment is when a Buddhist discovers the truth about life.

Canon: A group of literary works that are generally accepted as representing a body, or authoritative and official.

Precept: A *precept* (from the Latin *præcipere*, to teach) is a commandment, instruction, or order intended as an authoritative rule of action.

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2.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Siddharta's sight of first an elderly man, helpless and frail; secondly, of a diseased man; thirdly, of another deceased man gave him an experience of life as characterized by suffering brought about by old age, illness and death. Finally, the mendicant's life of meditation and serenity inspired the Prince Siddharta to renounce his life of luxury into a life of renunciation.

2. The prince had lived already the life of worldly enjoyment. As against it now, after the great Renunciation he experimented with extreme austerity. Now both the extremes of enjoyment and austerity do no good. So, he rejected both and found the "Middle Way" of moderation and meditation.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. The Fourfold truths of the Buddha are: The Truth of Misery (*Dukkha*), the Truth of the Cause (*Samudaya*), the Truth of Cessation (*Nirodha*), and the Truth of the Path (*marga*).

2. All the factors of the Eightfold Path are organized for transformation of the three aspects of human personality: intellectual, moral, and emotional. Thus, the first two are concerned about discernment or wisdom: (Right view and Right thinking). The next three are related to Virtue or Morality: (Right speech, Right conduct and Right livelihood). The last three are about Concentration or Meditation: (Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration).

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. There are two types of scriptures in Buddhism: *The Pali Canon* are scriptures of the Theravada Buddhists. Its name is derived from the Pali language in which the scriptures were written; and the non-Theravadin scriptures of the Mahayana Buddhists are *Sanskrit Canon*, parts of which are still existing in Nepal and preserved in Chinese and Tibetan translations. They were composed anonymously often by a number of authors, often elaborating the basic text, from around first century BC originating as written works, in Sanskrit.

2. The Pali Cannon is divided into three collections called Tripitaka: (i) Sutta Pitaka: it contains the core teachings of Buddha in the forms of Suttas (discourse). They are subdivided into five groups called Nikayas or Agamas. The last of them contains the commonly known texts: *Dhammapada* (collection of important religious and moral saying), *Theragatha* and *Theragati* (collection of religious poems composed by Elder monks and nuns). *Jataka* (collection of birth stories, some of which are moral fables with full of wisdom and humour). (ii) Vinaya Pitaka which consists of mainly rules governing the daily life of monks and nuns, the Sangha and how to keep the sangha working harmoniously. (iii) Abhidhamma Pitaka (*Abhidharma* in Sanskrit) is higher, precise and advanced formulation of Buddhist teachings, avoiding inexactitudes of colloquial conventional language as is sometimes found in the Sutta, and giving a detailed description of the principles behind the mental and physical processes of the Buddha's teaching.



UNIT 3

JAINISM

Contents

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- 3.2 A Historical Overview
- 3.3 Sacred Scriptures of Jainism
- 3.4 Basic Beliefs of Jainism
- 3.5 Jain Idea of Human Destiny
- 3.6 Jain Ethics
- 3.7 Let us Sum up
- 3.8 Key Words
- 3.9 Further Readings and References
- 3.10 Answers to Check your Progress

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we are going to cover the key features of a religion that has come down to us right from the pre-Aryan antiquity. It has given the world some unique doctrines in philosophy. Though we may not be able to make a detailed analysis of those philosophical doctrines here, we will see their impact on religious views. First, we will try to have an overview of its historical development. Next, we will identify its basic scriptures and beliefs. Thirdly, we will try to understand the Jain idea of salvation and finally learn the ethical teachings of this ancient religion and still practiced by a vibrant minority. By the end of this Unit you should be able to:

- Have an over-all glance at the long history of Jainism
- Identify the basic scriptures and beliefs of Jainism
- Understand the Jain Path to Liberation
- Appreciate Jain teachings on morality

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Jainism is one of the oldest religions of the world originating on the Indian soil. Jainism has a rich history not only because of its continuity of existence for over 2500 years in India, but also because of its unique contributions to Indian philosophy, logic, mathematics, art, astronomy and literature. Its special emphasis on ethical purity, religious tolerance, spiritual contentment, ecological protection is all of topical relevance to today's society all over the world.

Like Buddhism, Jainism also arose in opposition to the sacrificial Vedic religion, and the domination of the high caste. It does not advocate belief in God or gods to whom we need to pray nor does it accept the intercessory role of priestly class in society. It has empowered its followers to be spiritually self-reliant with its key idea: 'Everyone is maker of one's own destiny'. That is why it is fittingly called *Jaina Dharma*. The word "Jaina", derived from the root word *ji* meaning 'to conquer.' It was established by a 'great hero' who was himself a 'conqueror of self' to make his followers also to be 'spiritual conquerors.'

3.2 A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Our attempt in this section is just to have a glance at the origin and development of the Jain religion. After stating the traditional claim about its origin, we will devote more time to the historical beginnings from Mahavira. Then we will trace its development in the formation of schisms, and finally cast a quick glance at the present day situation too.

Origin from antiquity

The Jains consider their religion to be eternal and imperishable. The darkness of error may envelop the truth periodically. But the Tirthankaras will appear again and again and make it blossom in youthful beauty like the spring. 'Tirthankara' literally means a 'bridge-maker'. Religiously, 'tirtha' is the holy bridge for people to cross the ocean of the bondage of birth-misery-death (*samsara*). Jains recognize 24 Tirthankaras who have enlivened the faith, periodically. The first Tirthankara was Rishabha. The last of these was Mahavira. The Jains know their names and can narrate many details from their life. But their narratives about them all except the last two (Parshva and Mahavira) are legendary and mythological. Nevertheless, Mahavira was a historical personality, as corroborated by other sources as well. The 'Jaina Dharma' that has come to us is the one that was expounded by Mahavira only.

The Historical origin from Mahavira

Vardhamana (c. 599–527 BCE) was the second son of a chieftain of a politically powerful clan in Magadah, the present Bihar. His mother was sister of local ruler too. Obviously his upbringing was also royal. He was also married to a beautiful lady Yasodha, and had a daughter from her. When he was 28 years old his parents died of self imposed starvation as they were already believing devotees of Parshva (the 23rd Tirthangara who had lived during the 9th century BCE). May be that it had such an impact on the prince that he wanted to leave his home in pursuance of a life of asceticism. But he was dissuaded by the family members. But he was keen on his search that, finally after two years, he got the consent of his elder brother, renounced the family life and joined the ascetic order of Nirgranthas (Free of Bonds) founded by the teacher Parshva himself.

Mahavira the Seeker

After some time Mahavir felt that the precepts of Nirgranthas were not strict enough. So he left them and went on as a wanderer, without shelter to the vagaries of weather. He exposed himself to the attacks by insects, injuries and abuse of men, eating nothing but what was offered to him by others, often observing long fasts. He even realized the necessity of renouncing all attachments and possessions, including the only garment he wore. After such a long search of 12 years, finally when he achieved the state of 'omniscience' or *Kevala* (literally, aloneness) he was called *Mahavira* (the Great Hero) , *Jina* (victor, one who had conquered the self as well as the world). *Arhat* (a venerable person).

Mahavira' Mission

Immediately after his Attainment, Mahavira realized the duty to proclaim his path of liberation to all creatures, and revive Parshva's teachings. Now he also kept up travelling on bare feet, unclothed and begging for food. He preached to all, Aryans, barbarians, men and women, and even to the creatures like frogs. He attracted people from all walks of life, rich and poor, kings and commoners, men and women, princes and priests, caste-people as well as untouchables. Many of his followers also became renouncers, abandoning worldly pleasures, and being

convinced that renunciation was the way to conquer all passions. He organized his followers into a fourfold orders: two for monastic life and two for lay people.

- The Order of **Sadhu** (Monk) and the Order of **Sadhvi** (Nuns). They practise self-control and have given up all desires and earthly possessions become the spiritual practitioner and teachers. They follow strictly five maha-vratas (you will see in details in Sec.3. 5)
- The Order of **Shravak** (lay men) and the Order of **Shravika** (lay women). They are not required to renounce the world, but are expected to discharge household duties by honest means and live a progressive pure life. They need to follow twelve vows of lay people.

According to tradition, Mahavira won over 14,000 monks 36000 nuns, lakhs of laymen and laywomen as his followers. Now that he has, thus, founded the four 'thirthas' he came to be called the 24th Tirthangara (Literally, Bridge-maker).

Mahavira is remembered not so much as founder of a new religion as the renewer or reviver of Jainism. He was a great and powerful thinker too. He had taken a keen interest in all the problems of life at his time. The answers he gave were systematic and yet analytically interpreting even the minutest details of the issues. His spiritual power and moral greatness was recognized even by his contemporaries, belonging to other religions. Finally at the age of 72, he died of self- imposed starvation. This gave him still another title 'Siddha' (the one who has acquired Pure Consciousness). As any other Siddha, he is living on the top of the cosmos in a state of perfect knowledge, perfect vision, complete power and bliss. It is this night of his salvation that people began to celebrate as the Festival of Lights (Dipavali) in his honor.

Rise of Sects

In a few centuries after Mahavira's nirvana, the Jaina community (*Sangha*) grew more and more complex. One section of the Sangha was too ascetic minded and puritanistic in their approach. Another section was liberal. The disagreement between the two groups over largely monastic practices led to schism in Jainism, division that began around the second century BCE and was finalized in the formation of two sects in the first century CE: Later, many other points of disagreements (e.g., the question regarding the life-story of Mahavira, canon of Scriptures, the position of women etc. contributed to the schism. Thus, there arose two branches of Jainism:

Digambaras (literally, "the sky clad") maintained that:

- Monks must be naked because nakedness is proof of the conquest of sin.
- Tirthankars should be represented naked without ornaments.
- Mahavira never married
- Only males can achieve enlightenment. Consequently, women do not become naked ascetics. They cannot obtain Moksha.

Shvetambaras (literally "the white clad") opposed all the claims mentioned above. They upheld wearing of a simple white garment. Probably the regional factors must have contributed to the division. The Digambaras were principal force of culture in the South and in central India enjoying the royal patronage from the local kings. The Digambaras contributed to the development of vernacular language in these regions. But the Shvedambaras played much the same role in the North and the West of India.

Later Developments

By 11th and 12th centuries CE, the Digambaras had to retreat to the north, owing to the disfavor they incurred from the local kings, which itself on account of the spread of Hindu Bhakti movement.

By 16th century Jainism had reached the current geographical status and from now on it witnessed various reform movements within. From among the Svetambaras, a reformist sect arose about the 15th century by name **Sthanakvasi Sect**: criticizing image-worship, and temple-cult because it was not even mentioned once in the Scriptures. On the contrary Lonka Sa pointed out that the practice was not lawful. So there arose after him **Lonka Sa Sect**.

From the Lonka Jains still another reformer arose, Viraji of Surat. He was critical of the Sadhus that they were leading less austere life.

In the 16th century there arose two sects from among the Digambaras too. As against **Vishvapanthis (or Bispanthis)** who install images of gods like Bhairava in their temples, cover idols with saffron clothes, offer flowers, sweets and wave lights etc., the **Terapanthis** did not accept any of these.

The Present day situation

Many sects have arisen among Jains on account of minor differences. And they all agree on the main doctrines of the Tirthankaras. Today, the Jains remain a religious minority constituting 3.2 million of Indian population, yet they are powerful in retaining their identity. They are the oldest practicing minority of indigenous religion originating in ancient India. They avoid farming for fear of inflicting violence accidentally to insects. They prefer to be mainly jewelers, merchants, moneylenders, and industrialists. As such they live in urban centers in the modern states of Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka. As merchants and business people they are known for their honesty. Even though the Jains are a wealthy community, they seek out humanitarian causes to support them and relieve suffering. They are particularly renowned for operating centers dedicated to maintaining abused and sick animals. Their key principles like Ahimsa had such an impact on Mahatma Gandhi's policy-development regarding the use of non-violent resistance in his liberation movements.

Check Your Progress I

- Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. How did Vardhaman get the titles of 'Jina,' 'Mahavira,' and 'Tirthangara'?

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2. State the main divisions of Jainism?

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3.3 SACRED SCRIPTURES OF JAINISM

It may be convenient to divide the Jaina scriptures into two main groups: (i) The Early Prakrit Scriptures (ii) Later Sanskrit Scriptures.

Mahavira's teachings were first orally transmitted to people. His disciples, Ganadharas, wrote them down, first in the text form of 14 *Purvas* (earlier works) and then in 12 *Angas* (parts). They were faithfully preserved by the leaders of the community among the first followers. However, there arose some questions about parts of this canon.

Hence a Council was called around 300 BCE in Pataliputra to put together the Canon anew. There they found out that the 12th Anga, containing the Purvas, was not authentic. Bhadrabahu who knew this completely could not attend the Council because he was at that time on a penitential vow of 12 years in Nepal. Therefore, Sthulabhadra was instructed to go there along with many other monks and learn the Purvas from him. And the mission was successful too. However, in the process of transmission for 7 generation of teachers after Sthulabhadra, the knowledge of the 10 Purvas was completely lost.

Cannon of the Shvetambaras

It was in that context that Shvedambaras convened a Council at Valabhi in Gujarat in the 5th CE to edit and preserve whatever remained as holy works. The earliest portions of Jain scriptures belong to the period between 400 BCE and 200 CE. They are all in Prakrit or Ardhamagadhi language. This Shvetambara Canon contains 45 books. They consist of 11 Angas, 12 Upangas (Supplementary Portions), 10 Prakirnas (Scattered Pieces on variety of topics), 4 Mula sutras, 6 Chedasutras (sections on discipline), and 2 Sutras on knowledge. They are indeed the source books of Jaina Ethics, Yoga, Religion, Philosophy and Mythology.

Sanskrit Canon of the Digambaras

While not disputing with the dogmatic content of Shvetambara Canon, the Digambaras held that the language and form of Shvetambara Canon was not authentic. On the contrary, they were in possession of two very old Prakritik texts that predate the compilation of the Shvedambaras Canon. With those 2 ancient texts, the Digambaras tried to supplement them with commentaries and other series of works and made a claim that they were authoritative accounts of the Jain doctrine. They called their canons as **Anuyoga** (Expositions)

This category of Scriptures was written in Sanskrit largely from 700 to 900 CE. They take the position of the old lost Canon. They are distinguished into four groups and named them as Four Vedas.

- (1) The first Veda deals with history
- (2) The 2nd Veda deals with Cosmography
- (3) The 3rd Veda with Philosophy
- (4) The Last Veda deals with Ethics and rituals

An important feature of this Canon is that much of it deals with the lay community, and it includes writings that give a Jain a view of a world pre-history and of the origins of human institutions and everyday religious activity. This shows that a major development took place regarding systematization of lay life.

3.4 BASIC BELIEFS OF JAINISM

As regards **the basic teachings of the Jaina**, it may be convenient to present them in the form of the few propositions. We take care to enumerate only those basic teachings which are of general nature. Whatever is pertinent to the path of liberation and ethics will be treated in their respective sections below.

Oneness of all Scriptures

The orthodox position of the Jain tradition is that Holy Scriptures from the time of the Tirthankaras should essentially agree with one another. Only names are supposed to vary. Like the teachings of the early Tirthankaras, Mahavira's teachings also have been recorded in the Jain works. Though the different Canons have emerged, yet the basic beliefs about Mahavira are not questioned.

No Belief in God

Jainism is a non theistic religion. It does not believe a Creator God. For, it upholds that the reality of the Universe is explainable by the six substances: Jiva (Consciousness), Matter, Space, Motion-Ether, Resting Ether, Time. They are all eternal, having neither beginning nor end with respect to time. Accordingly, there is no need of God to create or manage the affairs of the universe. Universe is running on its own accord and by its own cosmic laws.

Belief in Karma

Central to Jainism is the belief in reincarnation and karma (merit and demerit). The self is polluted by karmic particles, bits of materials generated by a person's actions that attach to the soul and consequently bind the soul to material bodies through many births. There are eight kinds of karmas. The first four karmas are called Ghati karmas because they obscure the natural qualities of the soul. The last four karmas are known as Aghati Karmas because they are related to the body of the soul. If one successfully destroys all the eight Karmas, and when karmic particles are wiped from the self, then one attains release from the bondage. Once it gets enlightenment the soul no longer faces rebirth.

Jain Gods

In the path of spiritual progress, if one destroys all the eight karmas, then one is totally free, there is no body, no birth and death cycle, no feeling of pleasure and pain, or joy and sorrow. One attains such a liberation that one is a pure soul, now, with its omniscience, omnipotence, perfect vision, an everlasting blissful condition. One is now a **Siddha**, at the top of Lokakas known as *Moksha*. All siddhas possess the same quality of soul, and their attributes are same. However, they still maintain their unique identity.

But, if a person has destroyed only four 'ghati' karmas, one has regained the original attributes of one's soul omniscience, omnipotence, vision, power and bliss. But still one is a human being. One preaches the religion and remains in the state of blissful condition for the rest of one's life. One remains a **Jina** (One who has conquered one's inner enemies (passions) like anger, greed, passion, hatred, ego). **Nirgrantha** (means one who has gotten rid of all attachments) So, one is called **Arihanta**, one has attained **keval-jnana**.

Now, there are two kinds of Arihantas : If an Arihanta has established orders of monks and nuns, then one is called **Tirthankara**. If an arihanta does not establish the religious order one remains just a **kevali**. But one is in the state of perfect, blissful condition for the rest of one's life after attaining *Keval-jnana*. Now, all Arihants (Tirthankaras and ordinary-kevalis) and Siddhas are considered gods of Jain religion.

Jaina Prayer

Jainas do not ask for any favors or material benefits from their gods, the Tirthankaras or from monks and nuns. They do not pray to a specific Tirthankara or monk by name. By saluting them, Jainas receive the inspiration from the five benevolent for the right path of true happiness and total freedom from the misery of life. So the **Navkar-mantra (Namaskar Mantra)** is universal prayer which the Jainas are supposed to say every day, bowing their heads, and when they start good work and events:

- Namō Arihantanam: - I bow to the arihantas - the ever-perfect spiritual victors; Namō Siddhanam: - I bow to the siddhas - the liberated souls;
- Namō Ayariyanam: - I bow to acharyas - the leaders of the Jain order;
- Namō Uvajjayanam: - I bow to upadhyayas - the learned preceptors;
- Namō Loe Savva Sahunam: - I bow to all saints and sages everywhere in the world.
- Eso Panch Namukkarō: - These five obeisances,
- Savva PavapPanasano: - Erase all Sins.
- Mangalancha Savvesin : - Amongst all that is auspicious,
- Padhamam Havai Mangalam: - This is the foremost.

The Unique Doctrine of Anekanta Vada

It says that reality can be viewed from many (*aneka*) standpoints (*anta*). At least seven standpoints (*saptabhangi*) can be used to describe a thing. And all can be equally true. This is truly a Catholic outlook towards life. It is indeed an intellectual non-violence, implies respect for other views. It contributes to the tolerance of contrary opinions among different schools of thought. It has a special relevance for a multi religious society like ours.

Check your Progress II

- Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. State the central belief of the Jaina religion

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2. How did Jainism succeed in denying the belief in God as a Creator, Protector? What is the alternative?

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3.5 JAIN IDEA OF HUMAN DESTINY

As a religious reformer Mahavir was critical of the Vedas and the Brahmins. He saw no relevance of the priestly class and their sacrificial rites. The Jain religion is unique in this that it eradicates from human intellect the conception of God as creator, protector, and destroyer, and thus denouncing the worship of gods and goddesses as a means of salvation.

As an alternative to what he denounced Mahavira made religion simple and natural, free from elaborate ritual complexities. He insisted upon the popular impulse towards internal beauty and harmony of the soul. He expounded the features of the Soul in its pristine purity. Mahavira has said: "A living body is not merely an integration of limbs and flesh but it is the abode of the soul which potentially has perfect perception (*anant-darshana*), perfect knowledge (*anant-jnana*), perfect power (*anant-virya*), and perfect bliss (*anant-sukha*)."

In contrast, he made a through analysis of the pitiable conditions of the empirical self. He thereby established the need to fight passions and bodily senses to purify the soul and gain 'omniscience' or attain 'the total freedom' from the cycle of birth, life, pain, misery, and death, the Jain goal, known as Kevala-jana. The idea of supremacy of human and the possibility of attaining perfect power, knowledge, bliss. This is the sum and substance of Jain's idea of human destiny.

The first step in the process of self-realization is to discard superstitious beliefs and to adopt a rational attitude in life. Jainism lays down a definitive course of practical moral discipline, contemplation of the highest truth, and reorientation of life in light of these for attaining ultimate reality or truth.

The whole account of the Jain path to liberation may be summed up in three terms which are called **Ratna-traya** (three Jewels) in Jaina literature:

Right perception (*samyak darsana*): awareness of true nature of every substance of the universe, one's own self, religious goal, and the path. From the practical point of view, it means to have a total faith in the preaching of Tirthankaras, and their scriptures known as *agams*.

Right knowledge (*samyak jnana*): Along with the 6 universal Substance-entities and 9 tatvas, two specific doctrines of Anekantvada (non-absolutism) call for an attitude of openness. Syadvada points out limitations of knowledge and allows no room for assertions

Right conduct (*samyak charitrya*): proper action and proper conduct with a view to free oneself from attachment (*raga*) and aversion (*dvesha*) and attain the state of perfect equanimity. For practical purposes, one has to follow ethical codes, rules, and disciplines.

The three jewels, if cultivated **together** will ensure liberation. But if each of the three is practiced in isolation from the other two, it will cause conflicts or tensions. Individually, they are incomplete and insufficient because they are mutually dependent with one another. Right faith and right knowledge are required for right conduct; proper conduct through vows upkeeps proper perception and knowledge. Vows are to be undertaken with a full knowledge of their nature and a determination to carry them through.

3.6 JAIN ETHICS

A strict 'code of conduct' is prescribed in Jainism, not so much for the sake of morality as the path to liberation. In fact, Jainism views religion merely as a science of ethical practice. It conceives the human body as a chariot on which the soul rides towards liberation. The conduct of the present life should be aimed at attaining total freedom from which there is no return to the birth and death cycle. Every soul can attain godhood, i.e., supreme spiritual individuality by realizing its intrinsic purity and perfection.

The overall caste of Jaina's Path to Liberation is the Three Jewels (*Ratna Triya*) which you have seen just in the foregoing section: Right knowledge, Right intuition, and Right conduct. Now, the effulgence of the last mentioned Jewel consists in the Five Great Vows or popularly called '*Maha Panch Vrata*.' Here the Sanskrit word '*Vrata*' is derived from '*vri*' meaning "to select or choose." Technically, it means (1) choosing the right course of conduct, (2) exercising the judgement to see what is the right course out of several possible courses and (3) the effort of will (*viria*) implied. They are the following:

- Nonviolence (*Ahimsa*): not to cause harm to any life form.
- Truthfulness (*Satya*): to speak the harmless truth only
- Non-stealing (*Asteya*): not to take anything not properly given
- Chastity (*Brahmacharya*): not to indulge in sensual pleasure
- Non-possession / Non-attachment (*Aparigraha*): complete detachment from people, places, and material things.

Non-violence (*Ahimsa*)

Nonviolence is based on love and kindness for all living beings. Nonviolence in Jainism is not a negative virtue. It is based upon the positive quality of universal love and compassion. According to Jainism, all living beings, irrespective of their size, shape, or different spiritual developments, are equal. No living being has a right to harm, injure, or kill any other living

being, including animals, insects, and plants. Every living being has a right to exist and it is necessary to live with every other living being in perfect harmony and peace.

Truth (*Satya*)

Anger, greed, fear, jokes, etc., are the breeding grounds of untruth. To speak the truth requires moral courage. Only those who have conquered greed, fear, anger, jealousy, ego, frivolity, etc., can speak the truth. Jainism insists that one should not only refrain from falsehood, but should always speak the truth which should be wholesome and pleasant. One should remain silent if the truth causes pain, hurt, anger, or death of any living being.

Non-stealing (*Achaurya or Asteya*)

Stealing consists of taking another's property without consent, or by unjust or immoral methods. Further, one should not take anything which does not belong to oneself. It does not entitle one to take away a thing which may be lying unattended or unclaimed. One should observe this vow very strictly, and should not touch even a worthless thing which does not belong to oneself.

Celibacy / Chastity (*Brahmacharya*)

Total abstinence from sensual pleasure is called celibacy. Sensual pleasure is an infatuating force which sets aside all virtues and reason at the time of indulgence. This vow of controlling sensuality is very difficult to observe in its subtle form. One may refrain from physical indulgence but may still think of the pleasures of sensualism, which is prohibited in Jainism.

Non-attachment / Non-possession (*Aparigraha*)

Jainism believes that the more worldly wealth a person possesses, the more one is likely to commit sin to acquire the possession, and in a long run one may be more unhappy. The worldly wealth creates attachments which will continuously result in greed, jealousy, selfishness, ego, hatred, violence, etc. Lord Mahavir has said that wants and desires have no end, and only the sky is the limit for them. Attachments to worldly objects result in the bondage to the cycle of birth and death. Therefore, one who desires of spiritual liberation should withdraw from all attachments to pleasing objects of all the five senses.

Check your progress III

- Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1..Explain the importance of Morality in Jaina Dharma

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2. Elucidate the Maha-Vrata.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

Jainism is one of the oldest religions that originated in India. Jains believe that every soul is divine and has the potential to achieve enlightenment or Moksha. Any soul which has conquered its own inner enemies and achieved the state of supreme being is called jina (Conqueror or Victor). Jainism is the path to achieve this state. Jainism is often referred to as Jain Dharma or Shraman Dharma or the religion of Nirgantha or religion of “Vratyas” by ancient texts. It was revived by a lineage of 24 enlightened ascetics called tirthankaras culminating with Parsva (9th century BCE) and Mahavira (6th century BCE). In the modern world, it is a small but influential religious minority with as many as 4 million followers in India, and successful growing immigrant communities in North America, Western Europe, the Far East, Australia and elsewhere. Jains have sustained the ancient Shraman or ascetic religion and have significantly influenced other religious, ethical, political and economic spheres in India. They have an ancient tradition of scholarship and have the highest degree of literacy in India. Jain libraries are the oldest in the country.

3.8 KEY WORDS

Schism: Schism means a division or a split. Originally it was used to refer to schism in Christianity such as the East-West Schism, the split between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church in the eleventh century.

Incarnation and reincarnation: Incarnation, which literally means *embodied in flesh*, refers to the conception and birth of a sentient creature (generally a human as in the case of Jesus Christ), who is the material manifestation of a being or force whose original nature is immaterial or divine. Reincarnation means “to be made flesh again.” It is a doctrine or metaphysical belief that some essential part of a living being (in some variations only human beings) survives death to be reborn in a new body.

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3.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. The prince Vardhamana became “Jina” because he established beyond doubt his conquest of self. However, he could achieve this conquest only through severest ascetic practices. Thus he proved himself “great hero,” Mahavira. Tirthangara literally means “bridge-maker.” In the religious circle, it means one who establishes order of monks / nuns and thereby makes a bridge (‘thirtha’) for ordinary people to cross the ocean of *samsara*. And after his enlightenment Mahavira organized his followers into a fourfold orders: two for monastic life (the Order of Sadhu (Monk) and the Order of Sadhvi (Nuns), and two for lay people: (the Order of Shravak (lay men), and the Order of Shravika (lay women).

2. The earliest division was in terms of **Digambaras** (literally “the sky clad”) and **Shvetambaras** (literally “the white clad”). By 15th century there arose from among the Sevetambaras another division by name **Sthanakvasi Sect** criticizing image-worship, and temple-cult. On the contrary, Lonka Sa pointed out that the practice was not lawful. So there arose after him **Lonka Sa Sect**. In the 16th century, there originated two sects from among the Digambaras too. The **Terapanthis** rose in revolt against the idol worship of **Vishvapanthis (or Bispanthis)**.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. Central to Jainism is the belief in reincarnation and *karma* (merit and demerit). The self is polluted by *karmic* particles, bits of materials generated by a person’s actions that attach to the soul and consequently bind the soul to material bodies through many births. It is from this factual problem that Jainism tries to liberate the self. The whole of Jain religion is nothing but offering the techniques that solves the problem of life.

2. Jainism succeeded in denying Creator-God by giving an alternative theory about the structure of the Universe. It upholds that the reality of the Universe is explainable by the six substances: *Jiva* (Consciousness), Matter, Space, Motion-Ether, Resting Ether, and Time. They are all eternal, having neither beginning nor end with respect to time. Accordingly, there is no need of God to create or manage the affairs of the universe. Universe is running on its own accord and by its own cosmic laws.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. The Jain morality is an essential component of the path to liberation. In fact, religion according to Jainism, is nothing but a science of ethical practice. In this lies the importance of morality.

2. *Maha vratas* of Jainism has been adopted by every Indian tradition. They are *ahimsa*, *satya*, *brahmacharya*, *asteya* and *aparigraha*.



UNIT 4

SIKHISM

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Origin of Sikh Religion and Gurus
- 4.3 Sikh Scripture: Guru Granth Sahib
- 4.4 Teachings of Sikh Religion
- 4.5 Ethics of Sikhism
- 4.6 Sikh Institutions
- 4.7 Sikh Literature
- 4.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.9 Key Words
- 4.10 Further Readings and References
- 4.11 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to give an introduction to Sikhism. By the end of this Unit you are expected to understand:

- the origin and development of Sikhism through the successive ten Gurus
- the structural as well as conceptual framework of the Sikh Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, and its cosmopolitan vision
- the ethical aspects of Sikhism, ethical code of conduct, status of women and contributions of Sikh women to spirituality
- the practical implications of Sikh teachings
- the role of Sikh institutions
- the Sikh ceremonies, rituals and festivals
- the Sikh literature and Sikh socio-religious movements

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the history of Punjab, Guru Nanak appeared at a time when there was complete disintegration not only social and political but also moral and spiritual. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh religion, has presented a microscopic portrayal of society in his compositions. He was totally aware of his surrounding atmosphere, religious as well as non-religious. He condemns the external paraphernalia of religion with all its religious rites, ceremonies, sacrifices, pilgrimages, idol-worship and ascetic practices which enhance human's ego and deprive one of highest spiritual truths. He denounces the empty religious rituals and reacted strongly against the formal ways of worship of orthodox priestly class of Islam and Hinduism. Guru Nanak condemns the rulers for their failure to administer justice to the subjects, for enslaving the peoples' mind and perverting their sense of self-respect (GGS.471-72). To him, the progress of nations is linked up

with the moral life led by them and, therefore, the degeneration of the Lodhi rulers was a consequence of their moral degradation and wrong deeds.

4.2 ORIGIN OF SIKH RELIGION AND GURUS

The Sikh religion originated with the advent of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh Religion, and developed through the successive Gurus who appeared in the form of same divine light and reached its climax with the creation of Khalsa by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. The ten Gurus are Guru Nanak, Guru Angad, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Harkrishan, Guru Teg Bahadur, and Guru Gobind Singh. Here we will give a brief account about the first and the tenth Gurus.

Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of Sikh religion was born at village Talwandi, now known as Nankana Sahib in Pakistan and belonged to Bedi *gotra*. According to the popular legends, Guru Nanak had divine knowledge from the time of his birth and got revelation in Bein River near Sultanpur. After that he started his peregrination towards east, south, north and west and settled at Kartarpur where he stayed for 17 years. Guru Nanak's three important precepts are: first, contemplation of One God (*nam- japna*); second, earning one's livelihood (*kirat karna*) and sharing one's earnings with others (*vand chhakna*). Guru Nanak repudiated the orthodox practices and rituals of both the communities and stressed on the practice of truthful living. To demolish caste- system he insisted on common kitchen and built the first *dharamsala* or chapel of the Sikhs at Kartarpur.

Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), the tenth Guru, was the son of Guru Teg Bahadur and was born at Patna. He was fond of literary and artistic activities and had fifty two eminent poets working with him. He incorporated the hymns of Guru Teg Bahadur in the Holy Granth and installed Guru Granth Sahib as the living Guru. He confronted the Mughal Empire and struck a blow to the power of Aurangzeb. He sacrificed all his sons but refused to embrace Islamic faith. The spirit of the integration of the sacred and the secular was carried on by Guru Gobind Singh in the creation of the Khalsa in the year 1699 through the baptismal ceremony of *amrit* (nectar). The Guru had conferred on his followers not only the individual identity expressed by the five symbols but also the corporate identity of ethno-religious, ethno- social and ethno-political nature. The five emblems prescribed for the order of the khalsa, *keshas*, *kangha*, *kachha*, *kirpan* and *kara*, popularly referred to as the five K's are an indispensable part of the order of the khalsa. The distinct philosophy and a new way of the Khalsa was certainly a deviation from the prevalent Indian and Semitic traditions.

Check Your Progress-I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) How would you define the succession of Guruship in Sikhism?

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2) What do you know about the Creation of Khalsa?

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4.3 SIKH SCRIPTURE: GURU GRANTH SAHIB

The *Adi Granth* was compiled by the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev in 1604 at Amritsar. It got its title the Guru from the compiler himself and this was confirmed and ceremonially conferred on the scripture by the last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh in 1708. Besides the compositions of first five Gurus and the ninth Guru, compositions of Bhagats and Muslim saints are also incorporated in the Holy Scripture. The compositions of each Bhagat are as follows: Bhagat Kabir (224 hymns, 237 slokas and three long compositions viz. Bawan Akhari, Pandhre Thiti, Sat Var), Bhagat Namdev(61hymns), Bhagat Ravidas(40hymns), Bhagat Trilochan (4hymns), Sheikh Farid(4hymns and 112 slokas), Bhagat Beni(3hymns), Bhagat Dhanna(3hymns), Bhagat Jaidev(2hymns), Bhagat Bhikhan(2hymns), Bhagat Surdas(1line), Bhagat Parmanand(1hymn), Bhagat Sain(1hymn), Bhagat Pipa(1hymn), Bhagat Sadhna(1hymn), Bhagat Ramanand(1hymn). There are also compositions of seventeen bhatts or bards which are in the form of panegyrics in the praise of first five Gurus. The names of these bards are as follows: Mathra, Jalap, Bal, Harbans, Talya, Salya, Jalya, Bhal, Kalh, Sahar, Kal, Jal, Nal, Kirat, Das, Gayand, Sadrang and Bhikha. Besides, the compositions of Baba Sunder, the author of an eulogy, the *Ramkali Sad* and the eulogistic ballad (*Var*) of Satta and Balwand are also included in the Granth. The criterion for selection of the compositions of Bhagats was *nirguna* religiosity and conformity to the basic tenets of Guru Granth Sahib. Though these bhagats belonged to different regions with diverse religious and cultural background, yet their main doctrinal themes are in conformity with the basic spirit of the scripture, nonetheless, the reflections of their religious background are maintained in the Holy Scripture. For instance, Bhagat Jaidev's use of Vaishnava names of God

such as *Hari*, *Chakardhar*, *Govinda* (GGS,526) and Sheikh Farid's adherence to *Shariat*' day of judgement, fear of *dozak*, *satan*, (GGS. 1377) etc reveal their respective religious background.

The arrangement of hymns in Guru Granth Sahib is not subject-wise but it is in accordance with the *Ragas* (musical measures). The hymns to be sung in a particular *Raga* are placed together and further arranged as such, *Chaupadas* (four verses), *Ashtpadis* (eight stanzas), *Chhants* (six lines verses), *Vars* (ballad form) etc. At the end of the *Granth*, the Guru has given an index of all *Ragas* and *Raganis* and their families. The total number of *Ragas* is thirty-one and the compositions of the Bhagats are in twenty-two *Ragas* and are placed at the end of each *Raga* section. The hymns, *Ashtpadis*, *Chhants* and *Vars* of the Gurus come first in the order of succession and then the hymns of the Bhagats in the same format, followed by *Sahskriti Slokas*, *Gatha*, *Punhe* and *Chaubolas* of Guru Arjan Dev and couplets of Bhagat Kabir and Sheikh Farid, *Savaiyas*, couplets of Gurus, *Mundavni* and *Raga-Mala*.

4.4 TEACHINGS OF SIKH RELIGION

God: Sikhism believes in the monotheistic concept of One God who is Transcendent and Immanent; Impersonal and Personal; *Nirguna* and *Sarguna*. The uniqueness of God is manifest in different ways. He is the only one God and there is no other second. This absolute supremacy of God is apparent in the denial of the doctrine of incarnation, concept of *trimurti* and idol-worship prevalent in the Hindu society. One God is defined as Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer, having all metaphysical attributes such as Omnipotence, Infinity and Eternity. He is also described as Sovereign, Ineffable, Fearless and Benevolent. Though the stress in the Holy Scripture is on the unique, incomprehensible, *nirguna* and *nirankar* aspect of God, yet He is portrayed in His *Sarguna* aspects: 'From Formless, the Lord assumed the Immaculate Form and from attributeless, He became with attributes (GGS.,940). This reconciliation of the transcendent and immanent aspects of God is found in the whole scripture and is explicit in the *Mulmantra*. Hence God is described as the peerless, incomprehensible and unapproachable entity devoid of any caste and creed but dwelling in the innermost depths of man's heart.

Soul: There is an identical relation between God and soul which is mentioned as 'the Lord abides in the soul and the soul in the Lord.'(GGS,1153) The aim of man's life is to rediscover the real nature of self which is in no way different from God but indulgence in mundane aspirations reinforce his ego and strengthens this false notion of separateness. The problem of ego-consciousness is expatiated in Guru Granth Sahib in a different way. Ego (*haumai*) is considered as the greatest malady but cure of it also lies in it and that is by realizing its true nature (GGS, 466). The stress is on the transcendence of man from self-centeredness to God-centeredness and the identification of his finite consciousness with the cosmic consciousness. Realizing the true nature of soul, one understands the real nature of God.

Divine Will: In the Sikh religion, the concept of Divine Will (*hukam*) as an imperative has a specific metaphysical significance. Divine Will is all-pervasive and immanent and manifests itself in different ways which are incomprehensible to human mind. Not only the creation but also the sustenance of the universe is in accordance with the Divine Will. The Divine Will (*hukam*) is ineffable and inscrutable and cannot be described in words. None can define the limits of Divine ordinance as well as the deeds of Divine Being which are unaccountable.

Whatever originates in Divine Will also merges in Divine Will. The main impediment between man and God is man's assertive nature i.e. *haumai* or feeling of I-am-ness which leads to duality and causes confusion. By attuning to Divine Will, one cultivates all the qualities which bring about spiritual, moral and ethical enlightenment of man.

Divine Grace: It is often referred in the scripture as *kirpa*, *karam*, *Prasad*, *mehar*, *daya* or *bakhsis*. One cannot understand God through cleverness but He can be realized through Grace. Some men are destined for grace (*bakhshish*) and others are condemned to whirl about in transmigration in accordance with their deeds of past actions (GGS, 1). Grace is a mystery but it is earned by way of prayer and devotion. Grace is an overwhelming experience, beyond description (GGS,5) and is mentioned in the *Japuji* as *Prasad* or Grace without which realization may not come. To emphasize grace two terms are taken from the Muslim terminology i.e. *karam* and *mehar*—one from the Arabic and the other from the Persian. There are several expressions in the scripture indicating that not only by efforts alone but by the divine grace is the self inclined to prayer and devotion (GGS,6). Nonetheless, grace is not an arbitrary endowment, reserved for some and not for the others.

Salvation: The Sikh religion repudiates the speculations of the Indian thinkers about the future plane of existence and stresses that heaven and hell are just the mental states to be experienced here and now. The immortality of soul is also conceived in the sense of realization of eternity of values in the temporal world. The prevalent notions of traditional ethics regarding karma, transmigration and release are not taken in the same sense but the idea of inevitability of retribution for actions is defined in moral terms as coming near to God or going away from God due to one's own deeds. Karma and rebirth are closely related with the moral life of man. The mystery of the origin of man, cause of his bondage and the ultimate goal of his life are explicitly stated in the scripture. Man's birth and death are due to man's desires and those who contemplate on the Divine Word remain detached from the worldly entanglements and can get emancipation. It is admitted that human life has passed through innumerable existences, the number of eighty-four *laks*, which neither increases nor decreases is acknowledged in Guru Granth Sahib (GGS,156). The cycle of birth and death continues and in every birth, man goes on performing action in accordance with his past deeds. These accumulated deeds (*kirat karma*) determine man's present life and his way of performance of action.

Real perfection lies in restoring man to his original self which is possible by realization of and identification with the impersonal consciousness which is the foundation not only of the psycho-physical complex of the individual but of the whole world. In the mundane life, people usually adopt wrong values of life under the influence of *maya*. So long as consciousness is egocentric, all thoughts, feelings and actions are directed towards furthering the interests of the ego but by surrendering to the Divine Will through contemplation of word (*sabad*) of Guru, the divine preceptor, there remains no dichotomy between the subject and the object.

Check Your Progress-II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) How would you define the cosmopolitan spirit of Guru Granth Sahib?

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2) What are the basic tenets of Sikhism?

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4.5 ETHICS OF SIKHISM

The Sikh ethics stresses not on the theoretical aspect of morality or a mere description of moral life but is indeed concerned with the moral praxis and codes of human conduct. Spiritual realization is not possible without virtuous life and the latter is a continuous process of perfection and is highly commended in the Sikh religion. The stress is laid on the practice of universal moral norms such as wisdom, courage, contentment, justice, humility, truthfulness and endurance etc. These moral norms are desirable not only for the cultivation of inner harmony but also for promoting inter-personal relations at the cosmic level. It is held that the external paraphernalia of religion with all its religious rites and ceremonies, sacrifices and pilgrimages, offering of alms and charity is worthless, if devoid of divine name. The performance of these activities enhance man's ego and create barrier between man and God. The rigidity of mind and innumerable efforts done by man in the form of righteous deeds cannot enable him of divine communion. (GGS,787) The religious and social malpractices of persons belonging to different strata of society are pointed out to show them the right way of life. For instance, the Brahmin is he who has divine knowledge, practices austerity, contemplation and self-control, does righteous deeds in a spirit of self- culture and contentment; the kshatriya is he who has excellence in deed as well as the qualities of compassion, charity and beneficence; and the Muslim is he who has

faith in Allah, submits to Divine Will, loses one's self and is merciful to all creatures. (GGS, 1411, 141).

STATUS OF WOMEN AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO SPIRITUALITY

The Sikh Gurus have accorded an equal status to women who are the foundational basis of the Sikh religious life. The great works and achievements of the Sikh women in the social, religious and administrative spheres cannot be undermined, while evaluating the religio-historical progress of the Sikh religion. The prominent women, who occupied a conspicuous place in Sikhism, belonged largely to the Guru's family either as mother or as daughter or as wife or as sister. They have contributed for the Sikh religion in several ways viz. looking after the domestic affairs of their family during the missionary tours of the Gurus; assisting them in the implementations of ideals; accompanying with the Gurus during their preaching; helping the Gurus in making an impartial choice of successor for Guruship; doing works of social welfare; offering sacrifices of the Guru – husband, of sons and of grandsons for the cause of the Panth; and serving as beacon lights to the Panth. The most significant roles such as Bebe Nanaki's sisterly affection, Mata khivi's Langar organisation; Bibi Bhani's spirit of service, Mata Gujri's sacrifice, Mata Sundari's guidance to the Sikh community, Mata Sahib Kaur's designation as the mother of the Khalsa, Mai Bhago, the first woman General, Bibi Deep Kaur, the Warrior, Bibi Sharan Kaur's devotion for religion, Bibi Rup Kaur, the first author of Sikhism, Sardarni Sada Kaur, Sardar of the Kanhiya Misl's patriotism and bravery etc. are unparalleled instances in the history and development of the Sikh religion.

The nucleus of Sikh community life is based on the ontological principles laid down by the Gurus. The basic tenets of Sikh philosophy are belief in One God; belief in the teachings of the ten Gurus; belief in Guru Granth Sahib; belief in the necessity of *amrit, khande di pahul*. The main pillars of Sikh thought are daily contemplation and prayer (*nam-simran*), work hard (*kirat karna*) and sharing one's wealth with others (*vand chhakna*).

To implement the scriptural prescriptions about human conduct, there are found injunctions in Sainapati's *Gur Sobha*, formal codes of conduct by Bhai Chaupa Singh and Prahlad Singh, *Tankhahnama of Bhai Nanad Lal* and the Sikh Code of Conduct (*Rehat- Maryada*) compiled and issued by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committe on 3 Feb, 1945.

The Sikh community is bound strictly by the instructions laid down by the Gurus in the observance of ceremonies and modes of worship. Besides *kirtan*, one more significant feature of congregational worship is *katha* (discourse), lectures, *divans* etc. organized on special occasions. The function of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committe is to organize *divans*, lectures on *Gurbani* and on the life of Gurus and events of Sikh history especially during *gurpurab* celebrations. It has also set up Sikh missionary schools and colleges, Sikh religious libraries, Sikh museums. To serve mankind, it has set up hospitals, *serais* or *dharamsalas* on the name of the Gurus.

The unique tenets of the Sikh polity are *sangat* (holy congregation), Guru Granth and Khalsa Panth (plural executive), the *Gurmatta* (collective will of the people) and the *Sarbat khalsa* (democratic and egalitarian polity). The significant issues of the Sikh Panth relating to socio-

religious and political problems were discussed in the *Sarbat Khalsa* which used to meet at Akal Takht on the occasion of Diwali and *Baisakhi*.

To maintain the community discipline and to decide about collective decisions, executive council of five chosen ones is made who represent the whole community and all important matters are referred to this council which takes decision by *sarab- samiti* (unanimity) or *bahu- samiti* (majority-decision). Those who have failed to keep the discipline have to undergo penance (*tankhah*) which is some act of physical nature such as washing utensils, cleaning the floor etc. which the penitent must perform himself and must accept without any question. The liturgical texts from the Holy Scripture such as *Japuji*, *Jap Sahib*, *ten Savayyas*, *Sodar*, *Rahiras* and *Kirtan- Sohila* are meant for daily recitation by the individual members of the khalsa and *Sukhmani* and *Asa di Var* are recited and sung collectively every morning in the *Gurdwaras*.

The main festivals celebrated by the Sikh community are Baisakhi, Diwali and Holla Mohalla. Guru Arjan Dev ordained the celebration of Baisakhi at Harmandir as contrary to the Hindu practice at Haridwar. This festival is socio-political and religious occasion and is important for the Sikh community, being associated with the creation of khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikh community celebrates the important anniversaries or gurburbs such as Guru Nanak's birthday, Guru Gobind Singh's birthday, Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev and also Guru Granth Parkash Divas.

4.6 SIKH INSTITUTIONS

The highest aim of life is realization of spirituality and its expression through human conduct. It is clearly evident in the practice of three cardinal precepts i.e. *kirat karma* (honest labour), *nam-japna* (contemplation of divine name), and *vand chhakna* (sharing with others). These precepts are simultaneously functional both at the individual level as well as at the social level. The Sikh religious institutions such as *Gurdwara*, *Guru*, *Sangat*, *Langar*, *Dharmsal*, etc., encourage the concept of community worship and provide a model for an egalitarian society.

Gurdwara is also a central institution of the Sikh community. The word *Gurdwara* was first used by Guru Hargobind, meaning thereby home or abode of the Guru where Guru Granth Sahib is installed. The congregational worship and Guru Granth Sahib are essential features of the Sikh community life. A theo-political status to the *Gurdwara* especially to the Golden Temple has been accorded since the times of Guru Hargobind who installed the Akal Takht adjacent to the Golden Temple to set up an example of the integration of the spiritual and the temporal authority. Besides the Golden Temple, there are Historical *Gurdwaras* and Community *Gurdwaras* built up by the Sikhs to meet their social and religious needs. The Historical *Gurdwaras* are built on important sites in the Sikh history viz., Sis Ganj in Delhi, where Guru Teg Bahadur was martyred and Keshgarh Sahib at Anandpur where Guru Gobind Singh installed the Khalsa. However, the five *Gurdwaras* have special sanctity and are known as *takhats* (thrones of the Guru). These are the Akal Takht at Golden Temple, Amritsar which is sovereign and supreme seat and from where important edicts concerning community are issued; Patna Sahib, the birth place of Guru Gobind Singh; Anandpur Sahib, the origination place of Khalsa panth; Nander Sahib, where Guru Gobind Singh became one with the Infinite, relinquishing his body and Damdama Sahib.

The central *Gurdwara* for the Sikh community, all over the world, is Golden Temple where recitation of *bani* and *kirtan* is performed the whole day. Every *Gurdwara* is open to all, irrespective of caste, creed and status. One has to take off one's shoes, wash hands and feet and cover head as a token of respect for the Guru. Everybody can participate in the *kirtan* and *ardas* and can take offerings (*prasad*) and eat cooked food in the community kitchen (*langar*). All the community ceremonies, festivals and *gurpurbs* are celebrated in the *Gurdwaras*.

Guru (Divine Preceptor): The word Guru literally means one who removes darkness and is an enlightener and the first and foremost Guru, according to Guru Nanak is God Himself, meaning thereby the Word of God as the Primal Guru. After Guru Nanak, no doubt, there continued a tradition of guruship through the successive Gurus but Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, formally vested the authority of the Gurus in *sabad* Guru and conferred the status of Guru to Guru Granth Sahib. For the spiritual aspirant, the most imperative need is to contemplate on the *sabad* of Guru and to lead his life in accordance with the teachings of the Guru.

Sangat (Holy Congregation): It literally means holy congregation and the institution of *sangat* in Sikh religion has far-reaching social implications as it inculcates the feeling of brotherhood, promotes equality and provides opportunity for service (*seva*). Guru Nanak himself has initiated this institution which was further expanded by his successors as is evident from the large number of *hukamnamas* addressed to various *sangats* by the Gurus. Guru Amar Das established 22 *manjis* or preaching districts and knit the *sangats* into an organized system. To strengthen this institution, Guru Arjan Dev initiated the *Masands* system to look after the *sangats* in their respective areas. This institution has played a vital role in history as a forum for discussion of common concerns, and planning as well as execution of programmes of social uplift.

Dharamsal (place to practice righteousness): It literally means a place for practice of dharma or righteousness. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh religion, enjoined upon all *sangats* to erect or set apart a place to hold congregations regularly for recitation and contemplation of *bani* and these *Dharamsals* were supposed to provide accommodation and food to wayfarers and were precursors to the present day *Gurdwara* which came into vogue after Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Scripture, began to be installed in them.

Langar (Free community kitchen): It is a unique Sikh institution which has been established to represent the basic postulates of Sikhism that is earning with honest labor and sharing with others. This institution of community kitchen has social implications in providing equality to all and sundry without any discrimination of caste, creed, religion and denomination

4.7 SIKH LITERATURE

Dasam Granth:

The sacred writings of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh are incorporated in the *Dasam Granth* which consists of the following works: *Jap Sahib*, *Akal Ustat*, *Bachitra Natak*, *Chandi Charitr*, *Chandi di Var*, *Gyan Prabodh*, *Chaubis Avatar*, *Mehdi Mir Budh*, *Brahma Avatar*, *Rudra Avtar*, *Sabad Hazare*, *Sri Mukh bak Savaiye*, *Khalse di Mahima*, *Sastra Nam –mala*, *Pakhyan Charitr*,

Zafarnama and the Hikayats. Most of the Sikhs are reluctant to accept *Dasam Granth* as the work of Guru Gobind Singh because some of the compositions of the *Granth* such as *Chaubis Avtar*, *Chandi Charitra* and *Chritropakhyan* seem to them contrary to the Sikh precepts.

Biographies of the Sikh Gurus: These are based on the historical accounts of *Janam Sakhis* literature written about the lives of the Sikh Gurus in simple anecdote, parable and miracles; *Gurbilases* (recreating the lives of the Gurus in verse). These *granth*s are: *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin*; Koer Singh's *Gurbilas Patshahi*,¹⁰; Sukkha Singh's *Gurbilas Dasvin Patshah*; *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka*, containing poetic accounts of the ten Gurus. *Mahima Prakash* , composed by lineal descendents of Guru Amar Das. Bhai Santokh Singh's *Sri Gurpratap Suraj Granth*, a massive work depicts the lives of the ten Gurus in *braj* poetry.

Hagiographic Writings about the Life of Guru Nanak:The *Janam Sakhis* are the traditional biographies of Guru Nanak, founder of Sikhism, written during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries in the Punjabi-*Gurmukhi* Script. They present the life of Guru Nanak either in the form of platonium dialogues or in the form of anecdotes or stories delineating his greatness. Most of the *Janam Sakhis* were written in the land of five rivers which have been a meeting ground for different cultures and civilizations. The *Janam Sakhis* have mentioned various Sufis, Saints, Yogis, Vaishnavas and persons belonging to different denominations with whom Guru Nanak had lengthy discourses.

Check Your Progress-III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What type of role is played by the Sikh Institutions in the implementation of Sikh Teachings?

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2) What is the status of Women in Sikhism?

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4.8 LET US SUM UP

To recapitulate, the Sikh religion, one of the major world religions, is a revelatory prophetic religion, which despite of its passing through critical phases has flourished due to its distinctive spiritual ideology and moral praxis which is evident from the significant historical instances relating to the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Teg Bahadur and sacrifices of four sons of Guru Gobind Singh and the other Sikhs. Its Holy Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, is not confined to the boundaries of space and time but encompasses the whole humanity in providing solace and bliss due to its cosmopolitan spirit, inter-faith dialogue, and concern for spiritual transformation of human and for providing perennial solutions to the emerging problems of human life. The implementation of ethical aspect of Sikhism through its institutions is highly commendable and indispensable for the equality and universal brotherhood.

4.9 KEY WORDS

Anecdotes: An anecdote is a short tale narrating an interesting or amusing biographical incident. An anecdote is always based on real life, an incident involving actual persons, whether famous or not, in real places.

Baptism: Baptism (from Greek baptizo: “immersing”, “performing ablutions”) is the ritual act, with the use of water, by which one is admitted as a full member of a community.

Ordination: In general religious use, ordination is the process by which individuals are set apart as priests to perform various religious rites and ceremonies. The process and ceremonies of ordination itself varies by religion and denomination.

Parable: A parable is a brief, succinct story that illustrates a moral or religious lesson. It differs from a fable in that fables use animals, plants, inanimate objects, and forces of nature as characters, while parables generally feature human characters.

Paraphernalia: Originally, paraphernalia was the separate property of a married woman, such as clothing and jewelry ‘appropriate to her status,’ but excluding the assets that may have been included in her dower. The term originated in Roman law, but ultimately comes from Greek *parapherna* (“beyond the dower”).

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4.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh Religion, enunciated the monotheistic aspect of God and denounced the empty religious rituals and reacted strongly against the formal ways of worship of orthodox priestly class of Islam and Hinduism. His mission was carried on by the successive Gurus namely, Guru Angad Dev, Guru Amardas, Guru Ramdas, Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Harkrishan, Guru Teg Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh who abolished the tradition of personal guruship and conferred the status of Guru to Guru Granth Sahib.
- 2) The creation of the khalsa took place on 30 March, 1699, the day of *Baisakhi*, through the baptismal ceremony carried on by Guru Gobind Singh, when the five beloved ones were baptized in the order of the khalsa by *amrit* made from water and sugar crystals prepared in an iron bowl and stirred with a two-edged sword.. The Guru had conferred on his followers not only the individual identity expressed by the five symbols but also the corporate identity of ethno-religious, ethno- social and ethno-political nature. These five symbols are *keshas*, *kangha*, *kachha*, *kirpan* and *kara* popularly referred to as the five K's and are an indispensable part of the order of the khalsa. The distinct philosophy and a new way of the khalsa was certainly a deviation from the prevalent Indian and Semitic traditions.

Check Your Progress-II

- 1) The inclusion of the compositions of the Bhagats, the acknowledgement of their spiritual status and the preservation of their individual identity provide an ecumenical outlook to the Holy Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib and is also indicative of its catholic and cosmopolitan spirit. Another aspect of this cosmopolitan spirit of the Holy Scripture is evident in the provision of an interfaith dialogue in the scripture which provides a platform for discussion about religious matters with respect to their separate identities.
- 2) The nucleus of Sikh community life is based on the ontological principles laid down by the Gurus. The basic tenets of Sikh philosophy are belief in One God; belief in the teachings of the

ten Gurus; belief in Guru Granth Sahib; belief in the necessity of *amrit, khande di pahul*. The main pillars of Sikh thought are daily contemplation and prayer (*nam-simran*), work hard (*kirat karna*) and sharing one's wealth with others (*vand chhakna*).

Check Your Progress-III

1) The major Sikh religious institutions are *Gurdwara, Guru, Sangat, Langar, Dharmsal* etc. which encourage the concept of community worship and provide a model for an egalitarian society. The Sikh Gurus repudiated vehemently the social hierarchy based on caste system and preached their divine message of Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of mankind irrespective of caste, creed and religion. These teachings are simultaneously functional both at the individual level as well as at the social level and are carried on through these institutions.

2) To elevate the status of women, the Sikh Gurus, through their holy compositions and through the examples of their practical lives, have taken steps for the socio-religious equality of women. They condemned the custom of sati, female infanticide, adultery and seclusion of women by being in veils (*pardah*). On the other hand, they commended married life by giving it religious sanctity and allowed the remarriage of widows. The implementation of the ideals of the Sikh Gurus has been carried on by the participation of the Sikh women in the socio-religious field as is evident in the Sikh history. The women had made great contributions in serving and organising the community kitchen (*langar*), working as missionaries, sacrificing themselves and their families for the Sikh community, fighting bravely in the battle-field and offering guidance to the Sikh community in the critical periods.

BLOCK -3 INTRODUCTION

Middle Eastern religions, religious beliefs and practices of the ancient inhabitants of the Middle East were hardly known until scores of religious literature were uncovered by excavations in the 19th and 20th centuries. The picture is still incomplete, although from the available information it appears that the various religions shared many beliefs and concepts. It was from these roots that four of the world's best known religions—Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—developed. Three of the world's major religions, as well as Zoroastrianism that continue to exist today, arose from the Middle East. Up to modern times religion and politics were inseparable, and to some extent this is still true today there. For the majority of these peoples, their primary identity has been religious. People thought of themselves first as Muslims, Christians, Jews, or Zoroastrians, and second as a member of some ethnicity or as an inhabitant of a specific locality. The third block, consisting of 4 units, provides a student with a synoptic view of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Unit 1 on “Zoroastrianism” inquires into the politico-religious context in which Zoroastrianism developed, declined and later re-emerged. The major languages and texts of Zoroastrian thought, the Zoroastrian notion of God, world and human as well as human's ultimate end, the religious aspects of Zoroastrianism such as the Zoroastrian pantheon, the significance of the sacred fire, the priesthood, liturgy and religious ceremonies form the scope of the unit.

Unit 2 introduces “Judaism” as a religion. Judaism in the strict sense designates religious beliefs and practices of the Jews and broadly speaking it is the oldest monotheistic religion of the world. It has a written history of over 4000 years. It began as the faith of the ancient Hebrews in the Middle East and its sacred scripture is the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament).

Unit 3 studies “Christianity” arranged in four sections. Section one looks at Jesus Christ, the founder and the centre of Christianity, locating him in history. Section two is focused on the place of the Bible in Christianity. Section three studies the central message of Jesus' mission: the Kingdom of God, and its significance to Christian life and action in the world. Finally, section four studies the meaning and the nature of the Church, its doctrines and ritual practices.

The last Unit “Islam” defines Islam and describes its historical development. The main emphasis is on the fundamentals of the religion of Islam. The unit examines the essential belief system of Islam across the world with varying social and cultural contexts in order to gain an understanding of how this tradition has emerged and spread around the world posing new challenges.

The above given 4 units will give you an introductory understanding of religions of the Middle East. The Middle East is very diverse when it comes to religions, most of which originated there. Islam in its many forms is by far the largest religion in the Middle East, but other faiths, such as Judaism and Christianity, are also important. Zoroastrianism stands out as the most important among minority religions.

PUNIT 1

ZOROASTRIANISM

Contents

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Origin and Development of Zoroastrianism
- 1.3 Zoroastrian Philosophy
- 1.4 Zoroastrian Religion
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.6 Key Words
- 1.7 Further Readings and References
- 1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

Zoroastrianism is both a philosophy and a religion, hence we give an overview of the religious aspects of Zoroastrianism. We speak of the prominent deities, the significance of the sacred fire, the priesthood, forms of worship and major religious ceremonies.

By the end of this Unit you should be able to:

- understand the politico-religious context in which Zoroastrianism developed, declined and later reemerged
- the major languages and texts of Zoroastrian thought
- the Zoroastrian notion of God, world and w/man as well as w/man's ultimate end
- the religious aspects of Zoroastrianism such as, the Zoroastrian pantheon, the significance of the sacred fire, the priesthood, liturgy and religious ceremonies

I. 1 INTRODUCTION

Zoroastrianism, is the religion and philosophy of the ancient Iranians based on the teachings of the prophet Zoroaster, after whom the religion is named. It originated in what is now northeast Iran and later spread throughout Iran and beyond influencing the development of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The term 'Zoroastrianism' is synonymous with Mazdaism, i.e. the worship of *Ahura Mazda*, exalted by Zoroaster as the supreme divine authority. The Zoroastrian name of the religion is *Mazdayasna*, which combines *Mazda*- with the Avestan word *yasna*, meaning "worship, devotion". In the English language, an adherent of the faith commonly refers to him- or herself as a Zoroastrian or, less commonly, a Zarathustrian. An older, but still widespread expression is *Behdin*, meaning "follower of *Daena*", for which "Good Religion" is one translation.

1.2 ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF ZOROASTRIANISM

Life of Zoroaster

The exact date of the birth of Zoroaster is under dispute. There are six philosophers who bore, at different times, the name of Zoroaster. One is described as Chaldean or Assyrian, another as a Bactrian, a third as a Pamphylian, a fourth as an Armenian, a fifth as a Median, and a sixth as a Persian. Of these the one generally accepted as the founder of Zoroastrianism is one born at Rae in Media and flourished in Bactria. According to the Iranian tradition, he lived "258 years before Alexander" which is understood as Alexander's conquest of Iran in 330 B.C. He is believed to have had his first vision at the age of 30 and began his preaching at 40 and converted his king Gushtasp two years later. Tradition holds that he lived 77 years and hence scholars believe he must have lived between 630-553, 628-551 or 618-541 B.C. However, Dr. Haug is of the opinion that he lived not later than 1000 B.C. Mr. Kharshedji Rastamji Kama, a well known Oriental scholar among the Parsis holds that Zoroaster lived at least 1300 years before Christ.

Various meanings have been suggested for the name Zoroaster. Dr. Haug suggested that the term 'Zoroaster' means 'old camel keeper' composed of the two words *zarath* or *zaradh* meaning 'old' and *ushtra* meaning 'camel'

Zoroaster was a member of the family of Spitama, a descendant of Feridun, king of Persia of the Peshadian dynasty. "From the *Dinkard* and *Bundehesh*, two well-known books in *Pahlavi*, it appears that Zoroaster was the great-grandson of one Haechataspa, the fifth in descent from Spitama." In the *Avesta*, this is spoken of as 'Spitama Zarathushtra – Zoroaster of the family of Spitama.

The ninth chapter of *Yasna* and the *Aban Yasht* speak of one Pourushaspa, noted for righteous life and piety was selected by God to be the father of the Prophet. In *Pahlavi* works it is said that an angel presented him with a glass of wine. Soon after drinking, his wife Dogdho conceived and bore a son who was destined to usher in a new era in Eastern history. According to *Vendidad* (chapter xix, 4) the town of Rae, the birth place of Zoroaster, was situated on the banks of river named Darji. *Pahlavi* books note that the governor of the province resolved, at the instigation of wicked counselors, to destroy the infant but was prevented by divine agency.

Avesta narrates that as a youth Zoroaster passed his time in the deep study of philosophical questions and in divine meditation on the top of a mountain named 'Ushidarena'. His teaching is based on the divine inspiration that he received during the solitary study. At the age of thirty he left his native town of Rae and proceeded to Balkh, the capital of Gushtasp, at that time the King of Iran. In the thirteenth year of the reign of Gushtasp, Zoroaster is reported to have entered his court bearing the sacred fire called 'Adar Burzin Mehr' and a cypress tree. Zoroaster was first persecuted by the courtiers of Gushtasp but the miracles he performed convinced them of his claim.

Gushtasp embraced the religion of Zoroaster, the king's prime minister, Frashaoshtra, and Jamaspa, the two most learned men of the age, became the prophet's first disciples. Under the royal patronage the first disciples spread the message of the prophet and converted all the people of Iran to the new religion. Once the king accepted the faith he preached, Zoroaster produced the sacred books of the *Avesta*, which he had brought with him to court. They were written in the *Avesta*, a language believed to have existed as far back as three or four thousand years.

Fravardin Yasht mentions, besides Frashaoshtra, and Jamaspa, about two hundred persons as his principal disciples of whom Mediomah is given the first rank, and Gushtasp the twentieth; Hutosh, the queen is also mentioned as one of them.

Avesta mentions that Zoroaster had three daughters – Freni, Thriti, and Pouruchisti. And the Pahlavi works state that he had three sons – Isadvastara, Urvvatnara, and Havareehithra.

Nothing is mentioned in the *Avesta* about the latter days of Zoroaster. But the later Pahlavi and Persian books assert, with regard to his death, that one morning when engaged in prayer he was killed by a sharp instrument thrown at him by Turbaratur, the general of King Arjasp, who hated the new monotheistic religion. Zoroaster is then stated to have flung at Turbaratur his rosary, which killed him on the spot.

Brief History of Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism flourished for a period of 1000 years from the reign of Gushtasp until the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great. It declined for the next 556 years until it was restored to its pristine glory when Ardeshir Babekan ascended the throne in 226 A.D. He had the sacred texts translated into Pahlavi, the language then current in Persia and built fire-temples for the worship of *Ahura Mazda*. This restoration initiated by Ardeshir Babekan continued for the next four hundred and sixteen years until Arab invaders under Khalif Omar overthrew Yazdegerd, the Persian monarch in the year 651 A.D at the battle of Nahavand and destroyed most of the religious books. The Mohammedans offered them the alternative of the Koran or death. Almost all the Zoroastrian population embraced Islam, their fire temples were destroyed or converted into mosques and nearly every trace of Zoroastrianism was obliterated.

However, some of the Zoroastrians abandoned their homes and fled to the mountainous districts of Khorassan and later from there to the Island of Ormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf from where they set sail for the shores of India. They first settled at the small island of Diu in the gulf of Cambay and later moved to Gujarat and landed at Sanjan in the year 716 A.D. Jadi Rana who

ruled Sanjan gave them permission to settle there and at Sanjan they built their first fire temple (721 A.D.). (See *Sharma J.B. & Sharma S.P., The Parsees in India*) Waves of migration followed and in the next three hundred years their numbers grew and they moved to other places like Cambay, Anklesvar, Variav, Vankaner, Surat, Thana and Chaul. The term '**Parsi** or **Parsee**' refers to these early emigrants of Iranian Zoroastrians who emigrated to Western India over 1000 years ago. The long presence in the region distinguishes the Parsis from the **Iranis** who are more recent arrivals, and who represent the smaller of the two Indian-Zoroastrian communities.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Who was Zoroaster?

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1.3 ZOROASTRIAN PHILOSOPHY

The Concept of God

Zoroaster combined two words *Ahura* and *Mazda* to refer to God. *Ahura Mazda* is conceived as the great creator and governor of the universe. The entire universe is governed by him so He is called *Ahura* and everything in the world is created by him so He is *Mazda*. Creation and governance are the two principal functions of God. As Creator He is the Good Artificer and as governor of both the visible physical world and the invisible moral world He is the Preserver of the universe. He is also the Destroyer, the increaser as well as the decreaser. As creator He is the father of Reason and so He is '*Vahishta Mananh*' (Best Reason) and as the governor of the universe He is the originator of the Right Law and hence He is '*Ásha Vahishta*' (Righteousness) (See *Socio-Religious System of the Parsis*)

Zoroaster conceived God as supreme among celestial beings. He is beyond space and time, immutable and is the immovable mover of the universe. He is without form, without beginning or end, omnipotent, omniscient, pure and is of the essence of goodness itself.

Evidence from nature is considered the best proof for the existence of God. The harmony, the order, the law, and the system observed in nature leads the Zoroastrians from nature to nature's God. The regularity and harmony in nature led them to conceive God not only as the creator but also as the preserver of the universe.

Ahura Mazda is closely associated with the powers of nature but the Zoroastrian notion of God is not pantheistic since *Ahura Mazda* is distinct and above all mankind and natural powers.

The Two Primeval Principles

In an attempt to account for the presence of good and evil in creation Zoroaster conceived two primeval principles called *Spenta-mainyush* and *Angra-mainyush* which work under Mazda. The history of the world is history of the conflict between these two forces. The former is the creative principle while the latter is the destructive one. The *Spenta-mainyush* is the cause of all that is bright and shining, of all that is good and useful in nature. This beneficent principle appears in the blazing fire and the *Angra-mainyush* appears in the charcoal. The *Spenta-mainyush* is all light, truth, goodness and knowledge while *Angra-mainyush* is all darkness, falsehood, wickedness and ignorance. Those things that lead to the greatest good of the greatest number of mankind are the creations of the Good Principle and those that cause misery and pain are the creation of the Evil Principle. This conception of the twin principles does not lead to dualism since *Angra-mainyush*, also called *Aharman* is not conceived as omniscient or almighty.

Zoroastrian notion of the World

Zoroastrian cosmogony deals with three basic moments in the existence of the universe: 1) the creation of the world (*Bundahishn*). 2) the revelation of the Mazdean good religion (*Gomezishn*). 3) the final transformation (*Wizarishn*). Material existence is in a state of 'mixture' due to the aggressive activity of the *Angra-mainyush*. Life and non-life, animate and inanimate beings result from the fusion of the Good and the Evil. However, material existence is not considered negative.

The world was created in six consecutive stages. First the sky was made of stone and rock crystal, then water, earth, vegetation, animal life and human beings were formed. The earth is surrounded by a high mountain range (*Hara Berezaiti*). The earth is divided into seven large areas (*keshwars*). The largest section called *Khvaniratha* alone is inhabited by man. From Mount *Hara* (like mount *Meru* or *Sumeru* of Indian mythology) located at the centre waters descend and flow into the *Vourukasha* sea. Two great rivers *Daitya* and *Ranha* originate in this sea and they mark the eastern and western borders of *Khvaniratha*.

It is from mount *Hara* which is the highest spot on earth the souls of the dead depart on their heavenly voyage. In the middle of the *Vourukasha* sea is found the Tree of All Seeds, as well as another tree that is endowed with healing powers and confers immortality. It is called white *Haoma*, the chief of plants.

Gavaevodata (the bull) and *Gaya-maretan* (human life) both killed by *Aharman* (evil spirit) were the prototype of animal and man respectively. From their seed originated all good animals and the first human couple – *Mashya* and *Mashyanag*.

Everything has a dual existence – spiritual or mental (*menog*) and physical or material (*getig*) similar to the Platonic notion of the world of ideas and the world of shadows. The first of the

three basic moments in existence, creation is actually the separation of the spiritual and the physical. The second stage is their mingling and the third is the final separation of the two.

Zoroastrian notion of Man

According to Zoroastrian thought man is composed of the material, the vital and the spiritual. The spiritual part which exists prior to the physical and vital parts. At birth the spiritual is combined with the physical and the vital and at death it is separated. The physical part is called *tanu*. Vital parts are two namely, *gaya* and *ushtana*. The spiritual parts are *urvan* (soul) and *fravashi* (spirit) with their twin faculties of *manas* (mind) and *baodhas* (consciousness). The body is the instrument for the soul and spirit. Only in a healthy body the soul can function and so a healthy body is highly emphasized. The soul is responsible for the deeds of the body and receives due reward or punishment after death. Accordingly, it enters heaven or hell and commences the next life.

The notion of *fravashi* is not mentioned in the *Gathas* but find mention in other *Avesta* literature. The word is feminine in gender and is believed to be a feminine spiritual helpmate directing the soul to pursue the right course in every respect. It is a principle that guards, guides and protects the body from every danger. She is a loving friend of *urvan* and acts as the guardian angel of the soul. *Fravashi* is not responsible for the deeds of the body and hence receives no reward or punishment. On the cosmic plane she guards the world of *Ahura Mazda* against the evils of *Angra-mainyush*. Like the Platonic 'ideal' she exists prior to the individual whose guardian she becomes when the individual is born. She enters the body with the *urvan* at birth and guides it and separates from the body at death.

Ahura Mazda endows the soul with *khra*tu (knowledge, energy) *chisti* (wisdom) *ushi* (intelligence, perception, sense), *means* (mind or thought), *vachas* (speech) *shkyaothna* (action), *vaso/kama* (free will), *daena* (religious animated conscience), *ahu* (practical conscience), *fravashi* (guardian angel) *baodhas* (consciousness, memory) and above them *Daena* (vision or the revealed religion). With these the soul is expected to perform his duties successfully and get the reward. Zoroastrians believe neither in destiny or fate nor in saving grace, instead hold that steady industry, strong will and determination will ward off evil and bring about good.

Zoroastrian Ethics

The two principles, *Spenta-mainyush* and *Angra-mainyush*, found in creation are found inherent in human nature in the form of *Vohumana* or *Beheman* (Good Mind) and *Akamana* (Evil Mind). These two influence man's *manashni* (thoughts) *gavashni* (words) and *kunashni* (actions). When the Good Mind predominates human nature it results in *humata* (good thoughts) *hukhta* (good words) and *hvarshata* (good actions). But when Evil Mind overtakes human nature it leads to *dushmata* (evil thoughts) *duzukhta* (evil words) and *duzarshata* (evil deeds). The responsibility of man is to act in support of the Good principle and destroy the evil one. He does that by cultivation of land, rearing of domestic animals etc., and destruction of wild animals and evil creatures. Think nothing but the truth, speak nothing but the truth and do nothing but what is proper is the gist of Zoroastrian moral philosophy. Good thoughts, words and action consist in Honesty, charity and truthfulness. (See *Socio-Religious System of the Parsis*)

The Zoroastrian scriptures teach several virtues. One is exhorted to love order and harmony and hate disorder and disharmony. Obedience to teachers, parents, elders and lawful government is highly recommended. Great value is given to sanitation, purification and cleanliness. A believer is duty bound to keep earth, air and water pure. While fasting is not recommended the virtue of temperance or moderation is considered a priestly virtue. Charity is another highly recommended virtue for the Zoroastrian. The *Vendidad* speaks of three kinds of charitable deeds: to help the poor, to help a man to marry and lead an honourable and virtuous life, and to give education to those who are in search of it.

Zoroastrian Concept of Liberation

The Zoroastrians believe in the immortality of the soul. The *Avesta* writings of *Hadokht Nushk* and the 19th chapter of *Vendidad* as well as the *Pahlavi* books of *Minokheard* and *Viraf-nameh* treat of the state of the soul after death. The last book also contains graphic description of hell and punishment meted out to the wicked. A plant called *Hom-i-sophid* is held to be the emblem of the immortality of the soul. Heaven (*vahishta-ahu*) is represented as a place of radiance, splendour and glory while hell (*achishta-ahu*) is one of gloom, darkness and stench. Between Heaven and this world there is supposed to be a bridge called *Chinvat* (the discerning ground) where a man has to render an account of his life.

The *Gathas* mention that the successful souls after death crosses the bridge called *Chinvat* and enters the house of purity and eternal joy and light (*garo demana*). *Gathas* teach retributive justice in terms of reward and punishment. Every want and wish is fulfilled and the souls enjoy happiness in the company of other emancipated souls. The wicked souls at the foot of the same bridge descend into the house of impurity and utter darkness, is confronted and reproached by his conscience and bemoans his state.

The reward and punishment of the souls last till *frasho-kereti* or *frasho-gard* (the renovation of the world when the whole creation is to start afresh) and *ristakhez* (resurrection of the dead) which mark the end of the present cycle of existence. At this juncture there will arise the last *Soshyant* and the work of *Angra-mainyush* will be ultimately wiped out. The souls of the wicked will be brought out of hell and purified, being forgiven at the termination of their sentence. The souls of the righteous will also rise again and thenceforth the world will enter upon a new cycle, free from evil and misery. All souls will be endowed with new bodies and enjoy life of ineffable bliss and glory.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Discuss the Zoroastrian Concept of God - Ahura Mazda.

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What is the core of Zoroastrian ethics?

2)

1.4 THE ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION

Zoroastrianism is one of the most ancient living religions of the world with a history of over Three thousand years. Some scholars identify three phases in the growth of Zoroastrianism as a religion. The religion found in the Gathas (texts attributed to Zoroaster himself) is called Zarathushtrianism. The religious content of the younger Avesta is called Zarathushtricism and the religion of the Sasanid period is called Zoroastrianism.

The Zoroastrian Pantheon

In spite of polytheistic tendencies prevalent in the Indo-Mediterranean world, Zoroaster propagated a monotheistic religion. Deliberately did Zoroaster avoid the term '*daiva*' and chose Ahura Mazda as the name for God. He considered '*daivas*' as the progeny of *Angra-mainyush* and hence demonic powers. However, in the course of time and in the hands of generations of his disciples and later elaboration by the clergy many aspects of polytheistic and ritualistic practices of other religions and cults reemerged, albeit with some alterations. Zoroastrianism which had emerged as a reaction to formalistic religion absorbed many of the concepts and values that belonged to world it had rebelled against. The historical developments in Iran, and contact with other religions led to liberal loans from alien faiths.

The Sacred Fire

The most important symbol of Zoroastrianism is the fire but they are not 'Fire worshippers'. They prefer Fire to idols as a symbol of *Ahura Mazda*. In the eyes of the Zoroastrian, fire's brightness, activity, purity and incorruptibility bear the most perfect resemblance to the nature and perfection of the *Ahura Mazda* who alone is worshipped. It is the witness of *Yasna* (sacrifice) and the object of the priest's address and of the offering of the *Haoma*. There are three ritual fires – the fire of priests, the fire of warriors, and the fire of farmers. There are also five natural fires which reside in front of *Ahura Mazda*, namely, the fires in the bodies of men, animals, in plants, in clouds and in earth.

The Zoroastrian Priesthood

In ancient Medes the priests called *Magi* formed a separate priestly tribe. Zoroastrian priesthood today seems to be hereditary. Every son of a priest is called *ósto'* and daughter *ósti'* derived from the Avesta word '*Havishta*' meaning one who is to prepare the sacred drink', that is, a candidate for priesthood. In former times priesthood was open to women as well but not any more. The son of a priest to be ordained must first memorize all the *Avesta* except the *Vendidad*. He should be without physical defect or ailment. He is initiated into the priesthood through a month long *Nevar* ceremony and is called *Érvad*, the master of art in teaching and sacrifices. As he advances in years, knowledge and experience he is designated '*Mobed*'. When an *Ervad* has completed his study of the *Avesta* and of the recitation and practice of the ritual, he is admitted to the ceremony of *Marateb*, the highest degree in priesthood. The highest rank in the hierarchy of Zoroastrian priesthood is called the *Dastur*. This dignity is conferred on a priest by common consensus. The *Dastur* enjoys special privileges and primacy in performance of ceremonies. (See *Socio-Religious System of the Parsis*)

The Zoroastrian Worship

Zoroastrians have both private and public forms of worship with the recitation of sacred word and ceremonies. One of the most common personal prayer is *Nirang-i-kusti* – the prayer on untying and retying the sacred thread, *kusti* around the waist. This prayer is known by everyone and recited several times a day. Most public prayers are conducted by the priests and offerings of the juice of the *Haoma* plant, milk, sacred bread, ghee and holy water, sandal wood and frankincense are made. All prayer and worship are held in the presence of the sacred Fire.

The day is divided into five prayer periods which includes meditation before the sacred Fire. The *Haoma* cult which consists in using a mortar to extract the juice of the *haoma* plant (a species of Ephedra) is the main Zoroastrian liturgy. The preparation of the juice called the rite of *Paragra* is accompanied by the recitation of the 72 chapters of *Yasna* before the fire which is constantly fuelled. The juice is drunk after a complex set of rituals are performed. *Haoma* is administered to the dying as a kind of *viaticum* which is believed to bestow upon their immortality at the resurrection of the dead. Among purification rites, *Padyab* (ablution), *Nahn* (bath) and *Bareshnum* (the great purification for the initiation of priests and corpse bearers) are the most common. In these rites consecrated urine of the cow (*gomez*) is used. The confession of sins during *Patet* (a ritual of penance) and the rituals surrounding the establishment of a tower of silence are important moments of public worship. *Zohr-i-atash* is the funeral rite at the tower of silence (*dakhmas*) at which animal fat is poured into fire. It is performed to free the soul from the demon of corpse (*Druj-i-Nasu*) and to assist it along its heavenly voyage which begins four days after death.

THE ZOROASTRIAN RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES

Navjote

Zoroastrians are initiated by ordained priests into the religious community through the ceremony of investing the child with the sacred undershirt '*sudra*' and the sacred thread '*kusti*' known as

Navjote (new born). The same rite applies to both boys and girls. In the ancient times this occurred at the age of fifteen. The age of initiation into the faith of *Zarathushtra* was gradually lowered with the present day *Irani* Zoroastrians undergoing it between twelve and fifteen and with *Parsi* Zoroastrians initiating their children at the age of seven.

The rite begins in the presence of the ritual fire, the symbol of righteousness. On a tray a new *sudra* and *kusti*, with a new set of clothes are kept. The ceremony begins with the recitation of the *Ahuna Vairya* by the child. The priest presents to the child the sacred vest. This is followed by the elaborate rite of tying the *kusti*, thrice around the waist. At this time the child recites the *Nirang-i-kusti*, containing the most important part of the articles of faith.

As in Hinduism, the Zoroastrian initiation symbolizes spiritual rebirth or second birth. *Sudra* and *Kusti* must be worn every day and night during one's life time and one must ritually untie and tie the sacred girdle very time one prays or performs the *Padyab-Kusti*.

The *Padyab-Kusti* is performed before a Zoroastrian can engage in any religious activity as it ensures the purity of his body and soul. It is enjoined that this ritual be performed early each morning on rising from sleep, prior to religious act of eating, before ablutions, at the beginning of each of the five periods of the day and after urination and excretion.. All Zoroastrians do undergo the ablution on entering the premises of a fire-temple, to ensure that every religious act they perform is done so in the state of purity of body and soul. The *Padyab-Kusti* ritual, because it involves the performance of a purification rite, differs from the simple *Kusti* ceremony, in which a ritually clean person unties and reties the *kusti* without first performing ablutions; the simple *Kusti* ceremony is referred as "making new the sacred girdle".

The Wedding Ceremony

True Zoroastrian marriage is a sacred union of two souls complementing each other with the ultimate goal of doing good and maintaining self-denial. Fire in a chalice and an oil lamp is prepared on a side table. The bride and the groom are prepared by ablutions, prayer and acceptance of sacrament. The couple sits facing each other and a screen is held between them and their right hands are clasped. It symbolically represents God's action of uniting spirit and matter at the moment of creation. Two priests recite mantras, tying cotton thread over the clasped hands of the bride and the groom and then pass the thread round the couple seven times. Then the screen is lifted and both shower grain over each other. Then the couple is made to sit side by side and the marriage obligation is recited thrice in the presence of two witnesses.

Death Ceremony and the Tower of Silence

Zoroastrians believe that death is a weapon of the devil and the funeral rites are aimed at restricting the influence of the evil and keep it away from good health living beings. The dead body is not burned or buried but exposed to the elements of nature where the vultures and other carrion birds dispose of it This is done to avoid the dead body polluting the earth, water and fire. If the body is buried it would pollute the earth and water and if cremated it would defile the pure flame. The body is washed and wrapped in clean cloth and then placed in the *dakhma* or a circular stone tower called the Tower of silence. The tower has high protective walls but open to

the sky so that the birds of prey can have easy access. Annual ceremonies are held to commemorate the dead.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Discuss the significance of Fire in the Zoroastrian worship

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2. Explain the significance of the initiation ceremony of *Navjote*.

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1.5 LET US SUM UP

This brief discussion on Zoroastrianism, one of the most ancient living religions of the world, provides an insight into its origin, history and literature. The history is marked by periods of growth and development of Zoroastrianism especially in Iran and beyond. The invasion of Iran by Alexander the Great, and centuries later, by the Arabs led to the decline of Zoroastrianism in the land of its birth. The *Gathas*, the *Avesta* as well as the *Nasks* provide ample insights into the Zoroastrian Philosophy of God, world and w/man.

Zoroaster held that *Ahura Mazda* is one and only wise Lord of the universe. The twin primeval principles of *Spena mainyush* and *Angro-mainyush* are responsible for the mixture of good and evil that is experienced in creation. W/man who is free must join hands with the forces of Good and better creation through Good thought, word and action. Such a w/man receives the reward for his/her moral actions at the moment of death. There is no possibility of a vicarious salvation by the grace of a saviour in Zoroastrianism. One ought to work out one's emancipation oneself.

Zoroastrianism which emerged as a monotheistic challenge to the polytheistic tendencies of the Indo-Mediterranean region soon ended up embracing the appeal of the latter. Contact with other religions led to accepting several deities into their fold. The Zoroastrian liturgy is elaborate with several rites of purification and sacrifice. Of the many Zoroastrian ceremonies the *Navjote* is perhaps the most significant. The Death ceremony (*Zohr-i-atash*) at the Tower of Silence (*dakhmas*) stands out as a rite very peculiar to the Zoroastrians.

1.6 KEY WORDS

Monotheism: Monotheism is belief in one God.

Polytheism: Polytheism is belief in many gods.

Pantheon: The pantheon (*pantheon* from the Greek: meaning “every god”) is a building in Rome which was originally built as a temple to all the gods of Ancient Rome, and rebuilt circa 126 AD during Hadrian’s reign. The generic term *pantheon* is now applied to a monument in which illustrious dead are buried.

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1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your Progress I

1) Who was Zoroaster?

Zoroaster, the founder and prophet of Zoroastrianism is believed to have lived around 1000 B.C. Zoroaster was a member of the family of Spitama, a descendant of Feridun, king of Persia of the Peshadian dynasty. *Avesta* narrates that as a youth Zoroaster passed his time in the deep study of

philosophical questions and in divine meditation on the top of a mountain named 'Ushidarena'. His teaching is based on the divine inspiration that he received during the solitary study. At the age of thirty he left his native town of Rae and proceeded to Balkh, the capital of Gushtasp, at that time the King of Iran where he preached his faith and converted the King and many others to his faith.

Check your Progress II

1) Discuss the Zoroastrian Concept of God - Ahura Mazda.

Zoroaster combined two words *Ahura* and *Mazda* to refer to God. *Ahura Mazda* is conceived as the great creator and governor of the universe. The entire universe is governed by him so He is called *Ahura* and everything in the world is created by him so He is *Mazda*. He is creator, preserver and destroyer of the Universe. As creator He is the father of Reason and so He is 'Vahishta Mananh' (Best Reason) and as the governor of the universe He is the originator of the Right Law and hence He is 'Ásha Vahishta' (Righteousness).

2) What is the core of Zoroastrian ethics?

The two principles, *Spenta-mainyush* and *Angra-mainyush*, found in creation are found inherent in human nature in the form of *Vohumana* or *Beheman* (Good Mind) and *Akamana* (Evil Mind). These two influence man's *manashni* (thoughts) *gavashni* (words) and *kunashni* (actions). When the Good Mind predominates human nature it results in *humata* (good thoughts) *hukhta* (good words) and *hvarshata* (good actions). But when Evil Mind overtakes human nature it leads to *dushmata* (evil thoughts) *duzokhta* (evil words) and *duzarshata* (evil deeds). The responsibility of man is to act in support of the Good principle and destroy the evil one. Think nothing but the truth, speak nothing but the truth and do nothing but what is proper is the gist of Zoroastrian moral philosophy. Good thoughts, words and action consist in Honesty, charity and truthfulness.

Check your Progress III

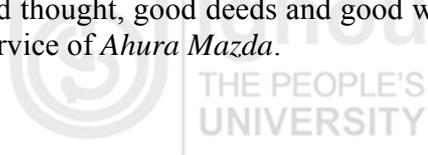
1. Discuss the significance of Fire in the Zoroastrian worship

The most important symbol of Zoroastrianism is the fire but they are not 'Fire worshippers'. They prefer Fire to idols as a symbol of *Ahura Mazda*. In the eyes of the Zoroastrian, fire's brightness, activity, purity and incorruptibility bear the most perfect resemblance to the nature and perfection of the *Ahura Mazda* who alone is worshipped. Fire is also a symbol of piety, purity, humility and brotherhood in Zoroastrianism.

2. Explain the significance of the initiation ceremony of *Navjote*.

Zoroastrians are initiated by ordained priests into the religious community through the ceremony of investing the child with the sacred undershirt '*sudra*' and the sacred thread '*kusti*' known as *Navjote* (new born). *Sudra* is the garment of the Good Mind. This simple garment and the white

colour symbolize purity and simplicity of the heart of the worshipper. *Kusti* means 'that which encircles the body'. It is wound thrice around the waist and symbolizes the three cardinal virtues – good thought, good deeds and good words. The wearing of the *kusti* designates a man to be at the service of *Ahura Mazda*.



UNIT 2

JUDAISM

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Monotheism of Moses
- 2.3 Conquest, Settlement and Evolution of Judaism
- 2.4 Beliefs and Practices of Judaism
- 2.5 New Testament Judaism
- 2.6 Rabbinic Judaism and Literature
- 2.7 Judaism in the Middle and Modern Age
- 2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.9 Key Words
- 2.10 Further Readings and References
- 2.11 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we deal with one of the oldest monotheistic religions, Judaism, though it does not fit easily into conventional western categories such as religion, ethnicity or culture. Here we explain origin and history of Judaism, monotheism of Moses, their beliefs and practices, and various offshoots of Judaism until modern time.

By the end of this Unit you should be able to:

- Appreciate the uniqueness of Judaism as a religion and its beliefs and practices
- Present a historical picture of the evolution of Judaism
- Find the continuity from Judaism to Christianity

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Judaism in the strict sense designates religious beliefs and practices of the Jews and broadly speaking it is the oldest monotheistic religion in the world. It has a written history of over 4000 years. It began as the faith of the ancient Hebrews in the Middle East and its sacred scripture is the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament). Yet, Judaism does not fit easily into conventional Western categories such as religion, ethnicity, or culture. Judaism, like Hinduism, does not have a founder and it is unable to pin point a time in history as the starting point. But, many believe that the root of Judaism is patriarch Abraham.

Though Jews claim that the doctrine concerning the one true God was communicated to Adam and this was passed on through an unbroken chain of ancestors such as Seth, Noah etcetera down to Abraham, the Book of Joshua testifies that Abraham too worshipped strange gods in Chaldea

(24:2, 15). In other words, the religion of the tribe of Abraham came from Ur of the Chaldeans and migrated first by way of Haran to Canaan and then to Egypt. It is this tribe that was later transformed into the religion of Judaism.

2.2 MONOTHEISM OF MOSES

The covenant with Abraham takes nationalistic overtones and historical transformation with the exodus from Egypt (Amos 3:2; 9:7). After impressing the Egyptian Pharaoh with magic tricks, Moses acquired liberty for the Jews in Egypt. Now it was Moses' task to lead the Jews out of Egypt to the holy land of Israel. He took the responsibility of making wise laws to maintain proper relations among the antagonistic tribes. With this aim he gave the "Ten Commandments." 1) I am the Lord your God, which have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me and you shall not make unto you any graven image. 2) You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. 3) Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy 4) Honor your father and your mother. 5) You shall not kill. 6) You shall not commit adultery. 7) You shall not steal. 8) You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 9) You shall not covet your neighbor's house. 10) You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. While deities of Egypt, Babylonia, Phoenicia demanded that the devotees should erect temples in their honor and bring a multitude of sacrifices, the deity of Judaism demanded high moral behavior and ethical conduct. God asked them to be humane and civilized.

Debates abound on the question whether monotheism or monolatry existed during Mosaic time. Monotheism denies the existence of other gods whereas monolatry presupposes existence of other gods (Exo 15:11), but advocated worship of one god (Exo 20:3). Majority of scholars believe Moses tried his level best to introduce monotheism. This is further corroborated by the fact that the Phoenicians, Aramaeans, Babylonians and Egyptians spontaneously increased the number of deities and grouped them into male and female whereas in Hebrew tradition not even a word for goddess is extant. Though in some quarters, goddess Ashera was considered to be wife of Yahweh, her altars were destroyed as idolatrous. Yahweh was without peers. (Deut 4:35-39; 6:4; Ps 18:32).

2.3 CONQUEST, SETTLEMENT AND EVOLUTION OF JUDAISM

Moses died before reaching the people to Canaan. Joshua took over the leadership. The Book of Joshua affirms that the land of Canaan was conquered militarily by Israelites. But, the Book of Judges testifies that it was a gradual settlement and not a sudden conquest. Archaeology conducted in Jericho too favors the latter. A possible reconstruction of history could be done by taking a compromise position. When the fugitives from Egypt (Moses' group) entered the high lands of Canaan, they met there people migrated from the coastal lands due to frequent wars between different city states. Slavery, famine and wars prompted them to seek safer places for habitation. Hill areas were safer because of two reasons: the main weapon of war in those days was chariots and these cannot climb steep cliffs and those on the top of the hill had the advantage. Therefore, there was relative peace in the high lands and this is symbolized by the phrase "land flowing with milk." Secondly, Mountainous areas provided food in the form of wild

honey, fruits and animals. This relative prosperity is symbolized by the phrase “land flowing with honey.” Thus, the high lands attracted two groups of people namely the coastal tribal people (Canaanites) and Moses’ group. They shared their experiences and discovered that they had the same god liberated them from oppressive powers. They decided to form a Tribal Confederation agreeing basically on three things: One God, One People and One Land.

Political glory, intellectual contribution and religious fervor reached zenith in the time of David and Solomon. David was successful in blending spiritual powers with political, which found its expression in the divine election of David to be the royal line and it was confirmed by the prophetic testament (2 Sam 7). This was immediately followed by the selection of Mount Zion as the dwelling-place of Yahweh and David transferred the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem making it the capital of the theocratic state of Israel. Eventually, Jerusalem became the religious and political capital of Judaism. Solomon converted Jerusalem as the Temple city and this paved the way for the gradual disappearance of shrines in other parts of the country.

The earth was considered to be consisting of three continents namely Asia, Africa and Europe descending from the three sons of Noah namely Sem, Ham and Japheth. Asians (Semitic) descend from Sem, Africans from Ham and Europeans from Japheth. The center of the earth is Jerusalem and the worship of Yahweh was centered on the temple of Jerusalem.

In BC 921, with the death of Solomon, the kingdom was divided into two: Israel the Northern Kingdom (comprising ten tribes namely Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Gad, Asher, Dan, Naphtali, as well as Ephraim and Manasseh, today known as “ten lost tribes”) and Judah the Southern Kingdom (made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin). Jerusalem was the capital of Judah and Rehoboam ruled over it. Division was both politically and religiously disastrous. The centralizing tendencies of Saul, David and Solomon were thwarted. To prevent his subjects going to Jerusalem, Jeroboam, the king of Israel erected many shrines in the north and allowed heathen practices to creep in and this paved way for religious syncretism. Though the images of heifers (calves) were originally intended to represent Covenant-God Yahweh, the worship turned out to be inferior compared to the worship in Jerusalem, which did not have any images. The dynasty of Omri in Israel established a new capital in Samaria and openly favored introduction of Phoenician idolatry. Queen Jezebel, wife of Ahab, even succeeded in erecting in the new capital a magnificent temple in honor of her god Baal. But, the prophets of Israel denounced idolatrous practices and the kings could not turn a blind ear to their agitations.

The eighth century prophets like Amos, Hosea and Isaiah of Jerusalem highlighted the interior meaning of the Mosaic covenant in terms of fulfillment of the duties and love toward fellow-beings and denounced empty *cultus*. This shift of focus from *opus operatum* of rituals (mechanical performance of religious rites) to sound ethical life is without any parallel in the Semitic religions. There were some attempts of reformation of pure religion (Yahweh-cultus at Jerusalem) during the pious kings such as Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah.

The Assyrians conquered Israel and Samaria fell in BC 721. The Assyrians brought native people and made them settle in Samaria and forced them into mixed marriages. This strategic move gave rise to a mixed generation, later known as Samaritans. They believed that real worship should be conducted in Mount Gerizim.

The Babylonians defeated the Assyrians in 605, and attacked Judah in 597 and 587. Solomon's Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians and subsequent exile of the Jews led to hopes of a future national restoration under the leadership of a Messiah, a religious-political-military leader. He was thought to be a personal Messiah, a descendant from the house of David.

The deportation of the wealthier and better educated Jews to the heathen and of Babylonia and their sojourn there for over a period of 50 years brought drastic changes in Judaism. It was a time of spiritual purification. Cut off from their homeland, Jeremiah and Ezekiel emphasized the value of the religion of individual even without a temple and external sacrificial system. They began to collect diligently their literature such as the Torah, prophetic and historical books, and parts of Psalter. The exilic prophets spoke of a "remnant" of the people, who would receive fulfillment of God's promises in the better times (messianic times).

Cyrus, the Persian ruler conquered Babylonians in BC 535 and allowed the Jews to return to their homeland of Palestine in 537. Some remained in Persia whereas many returned to Jerusalem. Jews began to reflect on the life of gentiles too. The worshippers of Yahweh felt themselves more akin to Persians than to the Babylonians since the former served God without images. If the creation stories of the Bible are heavily influenced by Babylonian mythology, the concept of Satan, resurrection of the dead, angelology and magic art etcetera crept into Judaism by the impact of Parsiism and continued to exert their weight in Christian era too.

Those who returned to their homeland decided to re-establish theocracy. But, this is a period that was characterized by strict religious legalism. People were exceedingly zealous in observing the old ordinances. Though prophets like Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi insisted on healthy ethical life, external matters of religion were emphasized. The leaders like Zerubabel, Ezra and Nehemiah nourished antagonistic attitude towards neighboring gentiles who did not live under the Law of Moses. Their intolerance of Samaritans can be understood from the principle of the self-preservation of the people of Yahweh.

Jewish exclusiveness found a dangerous enemy from the days of Alexander the Great, who invaded Palestine in BC 332 and imposed Greek language. Hellenistic philosophy, language, culture, customs, and the world-view overwhelmed Palestine. Though the pious Jews (Hasidim) took measures to shield themselves from Hellenism, the secular minded Jews were attracted to this new philosophy. Antiochus IV Epiphanes tried to suppress Judaism but was strongly opposed by the Hasmoneans. The Book of Maccabees in the Bible bears testimony to this holy war. But, when Jonathan Maccabeus attempted usurpation of the high priesthood, the ultra-orthodox Jews made a retreat to the caves in Qumran and dedicated themselves in the study, research and copying of the sacred scriptures. This group (formerly the Hasidim) was called the Essenes of Qumran. Some of the Essenes remained celibate. They held a philosophy of dualism such as the war between sons of light and children of darkness (this is not a *jihad*, but a spiritual dualism).

Eventually, there arose two other groups within the people of Israel itself, one was strict and the other lax with regard to the observance of the Mosaic Law. The strict group was known as "Pharisees," which means "Separatists" and the lax group was Sadducees, mostly the priestly

class, who were ready to compromise with demands of the times. The Sadducees accept the written Torah as normative whereas Pharisees assert the authority of Oral Torah too.

Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian of the first century AD, mentions in his book *Antiquities of the Jews* another group namely the Zealots, who followed the so called Fourth Philosophy (an armed war against foreign domination).

It is to be noted that there were friendly exchange between Hellenism and Judaism. For example, in Alexandria a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek was conducted in the second century BC, and this translation is known as Septuagint. Yet, the Wisdom literature especially Wisdom of Solomon defends wisdom of revelation contained in the Torah as superior to the Epicurean worldly-wisdom of Hellenism attained through reason. But, Wisdom of Solomon borrowed many ideas from Platonism and Stoicism, two branches of Hellenism. Net result was that the *hokma* (wisdom of the Hebrew civilization) was Hellenized. Philo, the Alexandrian Jew adapted Judaism to Greek civilization and to humanism. Thus, national Hebraism was adapted to Hellenistic universalism through allegorical interpretation of the sacred texts, which was contrary to orthodox rabbinical interpretation which clung tenaciously to the letter of the sacred scriptures.

The Roman general Pompey invaded Palestine in BC 63 and from then on till the New Testament period it was under Roman domination. The Temple was ultimately destroyed and burned in 70 AD and the Jews were dispersed all over the world (the Diaspora).

2.4 BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF JUDAISM

Judaism underwent evolution during the course of its 4000 years of turbulent history. Yet, Judaism professes to this day the belief in one, asexual, eternal creator God, who is a righteous and compassionate king, judge and father. The basis of Judaism is the faith in one God, and believes in the unity and oneness of the universal Creator. In all Sabbath, festivals and daily prayers, the Jews recite the *Shema* prayer (Deut 6:4): Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

Its uniqueness consists, perhaps, in its understanding of God as a living personal God, holy and merciful, and his relation to the world in a dynamic manner. Judaism purified and spiritualized itself because of its own inner strength. It also suffered a lot of relapses, but maintained its uniqueness.

Jews are often called *the People of the Book*. They lay great stress on sacred scriptures, their study and interpretation. The Hebrew Bible is the foundation of Judaism. In Jewish circles, it is known as *TaNaKh*, the acronym for *Torah* (first five books of the Bible), *Nebiim* (the Prophets) and *Khetubim* (other writings). The process of fixing the official list of inspired books started in 90 AD by the Jamnia Rabbis and therefore, the number of the books in Khetubim was not fixed in New Testament period.

A Jewish boy is circumcised on the eight day of his birth- this is the rite of *Brit-milah*. The naming of a Jewish girl on the eighth day is known as *zeved habat*. When the boy attains seven years of age, he is taken to a rabbi to study the scriptures. This continues up to the age of 12, when he takes a temporary vow to be a student of the Torah. At the age of 13, he becomes *bar-mitzwah* (literally “son of the commandment”), that is, a full member of the Jewish community. He chants a portion from the Bible at a special ceremony in the synagogue (when the temple existed, it was done there. Cf. Lk 2:41-51). In the modern times, Conservative and Reform Jews have a similar ceremony for girls called *bas-mitzwah* (daughter of the commandment).

An Orthodox Jew’s wedding begins with a *ketubah*, that is, a marriage contract signed by two witnesses, prepared for bride and groom. The document states groom’s obligations toward his bride. The marriage takes place under a *huppa* or canopy, which symbolizes the union of bride and groom and their future home. They sip wine from a single cup to show the common life they share. At the end of the ceremony, the groom breaks a glass as a reminder, in the midst of his happiness, of the destruction of the Temple.

Jews observe certain rituals in connection with mourning. The members of the immediate family sit *Shiva* after funeral services (*shiva* in Hebrew means “seven”). They stay in their homes for seven days, but do not mourn on the Sabbath. Mourners recite the *Kaddish* prayer written in Aramaic. Orthodox Jews observe mourning for parents for one year, and repeat the *Kaddish* daily. They observe the *yahrzeit* or anniversary of the death and recite memorial prayers called *yizkor* on holy days.

Judaism celebrates creation, revelation and redemption in the form of festivals. Major pilgrim festivals are Passover (*Pesach*), Pentecost (*Shavuot*) and Tabernacles (*Sukkoth*). Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), Day of Remembrance (Yom Hashanah, New Year Day) are high holidays. Other feasts are Hanukkah, *Divali* of the Jews (festival of lights) and Purim (Lots). Weekly holiday is the Sabbath.

In the synagogue, they kept an Ark where the scroll of the Torah is placed, a *bimah* (platform) where the Torah is read, and *ner tamid* (eternal light) where a lamp is kept burning always. There was also an *amud* (pulpit) facing the Ark, where the *hazzan* (prayer leader) stands while praying. A Yeshiva is a Jewish school of learning and *mikvah* is the ritual bath.

Check Your Progress I

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What is the monotheism of Moses?

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2) Give two religious practices of Judaism



2.5 NEW TESTAMENT JUDAISM

The New Testament portrays the Christianity as the spiritual heir of Judaism. Jesus was a Jew, Peter was a Jew and Paul was a Jew. Christianity started as a new Jewish sect, who followed the teaching of Yeshua of Nazareth, now commonly called Jesus. They did not change their religion, but claimed to be another sect or denomination of Judaism, which we can name “Christian Judaism” (Rom 11:11-13).

2.6 RABBINIC JUDAISM AND LITERATURE

Rabbinic Judaism emerged in the New Testament period to replace the temple cult at Jerusalem. With the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, their religion was no longer centered in Jerusalem; Jews were prohibited from setting foot there. Judaism became decentralized and stopped seeking converts. The local synagogue became the new center of Jewish life. Animal sacrifice was abandoned. Authority shifted from the centralized priesthood to local scholars and teachers, giving rise to Rabbinic Judaism.

It became an existential necessity for the Jews to compile the oral teachings. Rabbi Judah ha Nasi (135-220 AD), a Palestinian scholar, undertook the task of collecting and editing the oral teaching of the rabbis especially Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiba who were active at Jamnia in the 90s, and this collection is known as Mishnah (literally “repetition, study”). It can be called “the Jewish oral law.” This is the first written compilation of Jewish laws after the Bible. Rabbis of Babylon compiled and edited some of the oral law. These collections and their later interpretations are called Talmud (literally “teaching,” “learning”). It is the book of law and lore, which advocates ethical conduct among all peoples.

Even by BC 450-400 the ordinary Jews did not understand Hebrew language in which the Old Testament was written. We read in Neh 8:7 that the Levites translated the Torah into Aramaic for the people while Ezra, a Persian lawyer read it in Hebrew. These Aramaic translations became loose interpretations of the Torah, and the collection of these translations is called the *Targum*. E.g. Jesus read the Scriptures in Hebrew and interpreted them in Aramaic in Lk 4:18-30.

Through this new dispensation, Jews carried on their culture and religion through a tradition of scholarship and strict observance of the Mosaic Law. It was believed that the Torah was given to Moses by God through an angel. It took two forms namely the oral and written tradition. Sacred scriptures contain the written tradition. Oral traditions were handed down by rabbis through rabbinical writings like Targum, Midrash, Mishnah, Talmud, Gemara, Tosephta etcetera. The oral tradition took two forms namely Halakkah (literally “way,” and it contains rules for life) and Haggada (anecdotes explaining the rules). Thus the tradition of the elders or “fathers of the Judaism” became very significant in Jewry (Cf. Mt 15:2). In AD 1871, Jewish scholar H. Graetz

concluded that the Hebrew canon was finally closed only with the Mishnah, which he dated 189 AD.

Midrash (“to seek, inquire,”) is a research on the Hebrew Scriptures. Midrashim in the plural denotes the collections of rabbinic commentaries on the Bible. Gemara (literally “completion,” “tradition”) is the later rabbinic discussions on the Mishnah. Tosefta (Aramaic term meaning “addition”) is a collection of laws parallel to the Mishnah. It is said to have been collected by Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Oshaia in 3rd and 4th century AD.

2.7 JUDAISM IN THE MIDDLE AND MODERN AGE

The synagogue is the Jewish place of worship and the center of Jewish education and communal affairs. A cantor leads the services. Selected portions from the Hebrew Bible are read on the Sabbath, on holy days (*Yom Tov*), and on Mondays and Thursdays. The Sabbath begins at sunset Friday and lasts until sunset Saturday.

The rabbi, chosen by each congregation, serves as spiritual leader, teacher and interpreter of the Jewish law and scriptures. Judaism has no single head dictating religious dogma and no international body with authority over religious practice.

The Orthodox Jews (Modern Orthodox Judaism and Haredi Judaism, in USA and Canada alone there are 3 million spread over 3000 congregations) believe that every word of the Torah came from God on Mount Sinai. They also rely on the laws stated in the *Shulhan Aruk* (a Halakhic literature), the book of codes and decisions of recognized and learned rabbis. Out of the Thirteen Principles of Faith proposed by Maimonides in 13th century, two –*Ani Ma’amin* and *Yidgal*- are held by many Orthodox Jews. Men wear skull caps or hats (*kippah*) at all times as sign of respect to God. Some orthodox men wear beards and sideburns. They keep Sabbath as a complete day of rest, study, prayer and devotion. They do not work, travel or carry money on the Sabbath. They place a small *mezuzah* as a reminder of God’s presence at the upper section of the right doorpost of home. The *mezuzah* is wooden metal or glass case of three inches which contains parchment inscribed with 15 verses from the Bible.

An Orthodox Jew wears *tefillin* (phylacteries) during his weekday morning prayers. These are small boxes containing parchments with four passages from the Bible. A leather strap connects one box to the head. Another strap attaches the second box to the left arm near the heart (Deut 6:8). A Jew, when he prays, wears a prayer shawl called *tallit* with *tzitzit* (tassels) on four corners. There are 613 precepts in the Torah to regulate the daily life of every Jew and this number is symbolized in the threads of the prayer shawls. A prayer leader wears a special garment called *kittel*. Communal prayer requires a quorum of ten adult Jews, called a minyan.

An Orthodox Jew follows all dietary regulations strictly. They do not eat pork or pork products. They eat meat of those animals that chew their cuds and have cleft hooves, such as cattle and sheep. They do not eat shellfish, such as oysters, but only those fish that have scales and fins. They eat beef strangled, but slaughtered in a special way. They free meat of blood before eating it. They keep milk and milk products separately and do not serve them at the same meal. Food prepared in accordance with the Jewish dietary laws is called *kosher*, meaning “proper for

use” (The laws of *kashrut* -keeping *kosher*- are the Jewish dietary laws). Men and women sit separately in the synagogues.

In the middle ages, when Europe and Western Asia were divided into Christian and Islamic countries, the Jewish people also found themselves divided into two main groups. They are known as Sephardi and Ashkenazi. Sephardi Jews were centered in Spain and Portugal (under Muslim rule) and culturally linked to Babylonian Jews. When they were expelled in 1492, they settled in North Africa, the east Mediterranean, the Far East and Northern Europe.

Ashkenazi Jews were centered in France, Germany and Poland and linked to Jewish culture of Palestine and Rome. Over the past two centuries Ashkenazi Jews are divided into numberless denominations. Mysticism (for example Kabbala) and a movement known as Hasidim began to appear (they wear black frock coats). Hasidic Judaism is a stream of Haredi Judaism based on the teachings of Rabbi Yisroel ben Eliezer (1700-1760) and they accept Kabbala as sacred scripture. They accept a supreme religious leader known as *Rebbe*. The 18th century marked Jewish Enlightenment known as Haskala.

In the 19th century, Conservative and Reform Judaism emerged as an effort of modifying the strictness of Orthodox Judaism (1.5 million, 800 congregations in USA and Canada). Though the authority of the Jewish law is accepted as a rule, Conservative Jews (Masorti Judaism) believe that the concept of revelation is subject to many interpretations. They teach that Jewish law is not static, but has always developed in response to changing conditions. It holds that the Torah is a divine document written by prophets inspired by God, but rejects the Orthodox position that it was dictated by God to Moses. Conservative Judaism advocates that varied interpretation of the scriptures or laws should not lead to division of the Jews. It also insists that it is important to recognize the role of other faiths in the salvation of mankind. Men and women may sit together in a synagogue.

Reform Judaism (Liberal Judaism), born as a reaction to Enlightenment in Germany (Haskala), believes that each generation has the right to accept, reject or modify the traditions it has received. It initially defined Judaism as a religion, rather than as a race or culture, rejected most of the ritual ceremonial laws of the Torah while observing moral laws, and emphasized the ethical call of the prophets. But, they follow the sacred calendar of Sabbath and holidays. They may or may not observe dietary rules. Men often do not wear skull caps or prayer shawls in their synagogue ceremonies and prayers are said in the vernacular, not in the sacred language of Hebrew. Women are given a greater role in the service. There are about one million Jews in USA and Canada, and over 700 congregations. Reform and Conservative Jews today speak not of a Messiah, but of a Messianic Kingdom of Justice. They believe that a period of freedom and justice will come, not miraculously, but with God’s help and efforts of human beings.

As an outgrowth of reform, Zionism appeared by the end of the 19th century. Judaism in Europe suffered terribly during the holocaust, when Adolph Hitler attempted extermination of all Jews, and 6 millions of Jews were killed by the German Nazis. The Nazis often did not associate Karaites (scripturalists) with Jews, and therefore several Karaite communities were spared). This is one of the world’s greatest examples of religious and racial intolerance. The Spanish inquisition let loose a reign of terror on the Jews living in Spain, when many Jews were burnt at

the stake. This led to a rise of emigrants to Palestine and led to declaration of the State of Israel on May 18, 1948.

The original homeland called Palestine which was part of the Turkish Empire till 1917. Following Germany's defeat in the First World War, the British took a large part of it as the spoils of their victory. As a reward for helping them in defeating the Turks, they carved off Palestine and gave away the larger part to a Bedouin Arab, named Abdullah, who became the first Hashemite King of Transjordan (now Jordan). The remainder of Palestine was mandated by the British.

In 1947 Britain had to give up control over this part of Palestine which was divided into Israeli and Arab Zones. The Arab Zone went to Jordan. This division was accepted by the Jews but not by the Arabs. The Arabs went to war in 1948, they lost. The Arab states and the Arabs living in Israel could not accept the fact that Israel had been created. But, the state of Israel achieved remarkable progress amidst oppressive conditions of the Middle East. Any other community would have easily withered away in the face of the challenges that Israel faced. The ancient history of the virile community is as glorious as its present. It has given us Abraham, Moses, Solomon, not to mention Jesus Christ, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein and many others.

According to a census of 2007, there are about 14.6 million Jews in the world, seven million in USA, and 4.5 million in Israel. Though, there are claims that there were trade relations between India and Palestine from BC 3000, we have proofs for Jewish settlement in India since the 1st century of our era. Most of the Jews were concentrated in Kerala in South India. There is a synagogue at Cochin. They also lived in Mumbai and Pune.

Check Your Progress II

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What is New Testament Judaism?

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2) What is Rabbinic Judaism?

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2.8 LET US SUM UP

Judaism, as we have already seen, is a set of beliefs and practices originating in the Hebrew Bible as later further explored and explained in the Talmud and other texts. Judaism presents itself as the covenantal relationship between the Children of Israel (later, the Jewish nation) and God. It is considered either the first or one of the first monotheistic religions, and is among the oldest religions still being practiced today. Many of its texts and traditions are central to the other Abrahamic religions, with Jewish history and the principles and ethics of Judaism having influenced Christianity and Islam, as well as some non-Abrahamic religions. As the foundation of Western Christianity, many aspects of Judaism also correspond to secular Western concepts of ethics and civil law.

2.9 KEY WORDS

Decalogue: Decalogue refers to Ten Commandments, a list of religious and moral imperatives given by Yahweh to Moses on Mount Sinai in the form of two stone tablets.

Holocaust: The Holocaust (from the Greek *holókauston*: *holos*, “whole” and *kaustos*, “burnt”) is the term generally used to describe the genocide of approximately six million European Jews during World War II as part of a program of deliberate and systematic state-sponsored extermination planned and executed by Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler.

Zionism: *Zionism* is the international Jewish political movement that originally supported the reestablishment of a homeland for the Jewish People in Palestine.

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2.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) After freeing the people of Israel from the Egyptian Pharaoh, it became Moses' task to lead the Jews to the holy land of Israel. He took the responsibility of making wise laws to maintain proper relations among the antagonistic tribes. With this aim he gave the "Ten Commandments."

Debates abound on the question whether monotheism or monolatry existed during Mosaic time. Majority of scholars believe Moses tried his level best to introduce monotheism.

It was Moses who created a holy shrine, the tabernacle, appointed sacred seasons, holy rituals, celebrations of sacrifices, customary festival days with special focus on the Sabbath and Passover, and also ordained a priestly family to preach Torah and guard the sanctuary.

- 2) A Jewish boy is circumcised on the eighth day of his birth- this is the rite of *Brit-milah*. The naming of a Jewish girl on the eighth day is known as *zeved habat*. When the boy attains seven years of age, he is taken to a rabbi to study the scriptures. This continues up to the age of 12, when he takes a temporary vow to be a student of the Torah. At the age of 13, he becomes *bar-mitzvah* (literally "son of the commandment"), that is, a full member of the Jewish community. He chants a portion from the Bible at a special ceremony in the synagogue

An Orthodox Jew's wedding begins with a *ketubah*, that is, a marriage contract signed by two witnesses, prepared for bride and groom. The document states groom's obligations toward his bride. The marriage takes place under a *huppa* or canopy, which symbolizes the union of bride and groom and their future home. They sip wine from a single cup to show the common life they share. At the end of the ceremony, the groom breaks a glass as a reminder, in the midst of his happiness, of the destruction of the Temple.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) The New Testament portrays the Christianity as the spiritual heirs of Judaism. Jesus was a Jew, Peter was a Jew and Paul was a Jew. Christianity started as a new Jewish sect, who followed the teaching of Yeshua of Nazareth, now commonly called Jesus. They did not change their religion, but claimed to be another sect or denomination of Judaism, which we can name "Christian Judaism".
- 2) Rabbinic Judaism emerged in the New Testament period to replace the temple cult at Jerusalem. With the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, their religion was no longer centred in Jerusalem; Jews were prohibited from setting foot there. Judaism became decentralized and stopped seeking converts. The local synagogue became the new centre

of Jewish life. Animal sacrifice was abandoned. Authority shifted from the centralized priesthood to local scholars and teachers, giving rise to Rabbinic Judaism.



UNIT 3

CHRISTIANITY

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Christianity, a religion centred on Jesus Christ
- 3.3 Historicity of Jesus of Nazareth
- 3.4 The Christian Bible
- 3.5 The Kingdom of God, the central teaching of Jesus
- 3.6 Christianity, a Communitarian Religion
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Key Words
- 3.9 Further Readings and References
- 3.10 Answers to Check Your Progress.

3.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the study of the unit you are expected to:

- Comprehend the essentials of Christianity in a clear and systematic way
- Introduce Christianity as it is to persons who have no knowledge of it
- Make an attempt to perfect the knowledge of those who desire so

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Founded in the first century of the Common Era by Jesus Christ, Christianity has become the largest of the world religions. Geographically it is the most widely diffused of all religions. Seen from the demographic point of view, it is also the universal religion, embracing people of every race, language, colour, culture and nationality who make up one third of the world population. This characteristic mark of Christianity is equally true when we look at its position in our country. Though the Christian population is only 2.34 per cent of the nation's population, it is the most widespread religion both geographically and demographically. We will study some essential features of Christianity in this unit arranged in sections.

3.2 CHRISTIANITY, A RELIGION CENTRED ON JESUS CHRIST

Christianity is centred on Jesus of Nazareth, known as Jesus Christ – the one whom Christians believe to be both human and divine. Christianity is the religion of those who worship him as Son of God, the unique self-revelation of God for the salvation of the world. The Gospel of Mark begins his narrative with the following words: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1).

Christianity is a way of life. Being a Christian is not just about beliefs. It is about a definite way of living which involves everyday life being affected in some way by the person of Jesus Christ. His spiritual presence is believed to abide in the church. A Christian can be described as an adopted child of God, someone who has entered into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

3.3 HISTORICITY OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Jesus was a Jew. He was born around the year 3 BCE in Bethlehem in the Judean territory of Palestine during the reign of the Emperor Augustus (23 BCE – 14 CE; see Luke 2:1-7). He was brought up in Nazareth, a village in the territory of Galilee. He carried out his public ministry during the reign of Emperor Tiberius (14 – 37 CE), when Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee (4 BCE – 39 CE; see Luke 3:1); and died on the cross around the year 30 CE under Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Southern Palestine (Mark 15:1). This historical character of Christianity has been spelt out in the Creed (Christian manifesto of belief) that Jesus “was crucified under Pontius Pilate and died.”

The four gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and the rest of the New Testament – are the primary sources for the life of Jesus Christ. There are few references to Jesus in the writings of Roman historians, who had little time for events which took place in a remote corner of their empire. The historian Tacitus, writing about CE 115, refers to the persecution of Christians by Emperor Nero in CE 64, and says, “Christ, from whom the name [of Christian] was given, had been put to death in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate.” The correspondence of Pliny the Younger with the Emperor Trajan in CE 111 shows that Christians worshipped Christ “as if he were a god” and refused to worship the statues of the emperor and the Roman gods.

The name “Jesus Christ” needs some explanation. The name “Jesus”, derived from the Hebrew name “*Yeshua*”, literally means “God saves.” The word “Christ” is the anglicised version of the Greek word *Christos* which is the translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*. These two words – *Christos* and *Messiah* – mean “the anointed one” or *abhisikta*. Messiah or Christ is a confessional title of honour (title of faith proclamation) given to Jesus who was anointed by God for special divine purpose. The Jews hoped for centuries that God would send his Messiah (God’s anointed one) to restore the Kingdom of Israel to its ideal glory, and to change the hearts and minds of the people towards the path of God. Time and time again the prophets of Israel had spoken about the arrival of Messiah and the inauguration of God’s kingdom. Christians saw the fulfilment of this hope in the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth, especially after he was raised from the dead. So, they confessed him as the “Messiah of God” (Luke 9:20), which means the Christ of God, or simply Jesus Christ.

3.4 THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE

Anyone beginning to study Christianity soon realises how central the Bible is. Almost all that is known about Jesus Christ is contained in the pages of the Bible. It is one of the most widely read books in the world and has had a far-reaching impact on society and culture across the world.

Countless commentaries on the Bible are available in bookstores and libraries. If one attends a Christian service of worship, one will hear a passage from the Bible read and a sermon on the passage. Bible is an essential part of Christian worship. It is the primary source of Christian way of life and action in the world. Millions of Christians all over the world begin the day with a meditation on a biblical passage.

The term 'the Bible,' which is also known as 'Sacred Scripture' and 'Holy Scripture', comes from the Greek phrase '*ta biblia*', meaning "the books." The Greek phrase is plural, referring to a collection of books, or writings. So, true to its meaning, the Roman Catholic Bible has 72 books and Protestant version 66. These books are regarded as authoritative (canonical) books of Christianity. These are written over a period of more than 1,000 years, in widely-differing cultural and historical contexts, and in a rich variety of literary styles.

Check your progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

(1) Describe why Christianity is centred on the person of Jesus Christ?

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(2) What importance do you see given to the Bible in Christianity?

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The Old Testament and the New Testament

The Bible is divided into two major parts, the *Old Testament* and the *New Testament*. The term 'testament' comes from the Latin word '*testamentum*' which means a 'will' or a 'testimony' made by a person especially before death. The first and by far the larger part, which Christians classify as the Old Testament, is basically the Scriptures of Judaism (also known as the Hebrew Scriptures). It is almost entirely written in Hebrew, the language of Israel, and some books written in Aramaic, an international language of the ancient Near-eastern world. The Old Testament narrates the history and the religious thought (or the faith testimony) of Judaism up to the time of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament

The specifically Christian books of the Bible are collectively known as the New Testament. It comprises 27 writings by Christians of the first century CE. These are mostly short in size. While most of the writers were of Jewish origin, the books are in Greek, which was the common language of the Roman Empire.

The New Testament begins with the *four gospels*. The gospels give an account of the life and teaching of Jesus as well as reflection on who Jesus is and what he means for the world. This is

followed by the *Acts of the Apostles* that tells the story of the first thirty years of the Christian church. There are then thirteen *letters of Paul*, the persecutor of Christians who became its great missionary leader after his dramatic encounter with the Risen Jesus on the way to Damascus. His letters are written to churches and individuals of the Mediterranean region. His first letter was written within 25 years of Jesus' death. This is followed by eight other letters known as *Catholic Letters* written by early Christian leaders to various churches. And then there is the *Book of Revelation* of John which is a visionary work cast in the literary style of Jewish visionary literature, known as the apocalyptic literature. It is a book of hope addressed to the seven young churches of Asia Minor which were under severe stress on account of persecution.

The Gospels

The first four books of the New Testament are known as 'gospels' or 'good news.' The word 'gospel' calls for an explanation. It comes from an old English word 'godspell.' It is a combination of two words: 'good,' and 'spell.' *Godspell* means 'good news' which is the translation of the Greek word *euangellion*, meaning 'good news.' *Euangellion* was the original word used for the gospels by four different authors who wrote the gospels. These authors are known as *evangelists*. They are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Mark wrote around the year 64 CE, Matthew and Luke 67 CE, and John 95 – 100 CE. Thus, these books are called gospels because they are focused on the events centred on the life and message of Jesus Christ which was seen as good news for the world in so far as they are intended for holistic flourishing of people as God's children.

The Gospels are faith documents

The starting point of the four gospels is the historical Jesus of Nazareth. His words and deeds were seen and heard by his apostles and immediate disciples. In the tradition of religious teachers of Judaism, Jesus taught them to remember his teaching, so that they might pass them with utmost loyalty. The contents of their preaching and teaching regarding Jesus were circulating in oral tradition in the early Christian communities.

One must be aware of the fact that Christians were proclaiming the words and actions of Jesus Christ shortly after his death and resurrection around the year 30 CE. Christian communities (churches) were being established in the Eastern Mediterranean region within a matter of years. The stories of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and his teaching were preserved in these churches by way of oral tradition. It was only around the year 65 CE onwards that these stories were collected and committed to writing as gospels by the evangelists.

The evangelists were not biographers, or even historians, by our modern standards. They were not interested in providing an account of everything that Jesus said and did. Each evangelist selected his material, arranged them in a particular way and edited them by giving a particular theological interpretation (an interpretation in the light of faith) to historical accounts of Jesus' words and deeds. The gospels contain a great deal of historical information about Jesus but always interpreted by evangelists to show how God's plan has been enacted in history for the salvation of humankind in and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Bible, the Word of God

Christians revere the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) as the Word of God. They hold that it is a divinely inspired book written in human language, subject to all human limitations. 'Inspired book' means that the Bible is not merely a great literature that brings spiritual enlightenment but that it comes from God. Inspiration does not imply that the human authors are mere passive instruments for a divine action. But it does mean that what the human authors wrote in their own language, and in their own historical and cultural setting, was directed by God so that the written text of the Bible is really the word of God in human words. Any recognisable Christian faith must be based on the Bible. That is why Bible translation is a major concern of Christian churches. Today the whole of Bible is available in some 330 languages and the New Testament over 900 languages.

Check your progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

(1) Write a short note on New Testament

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(2) Explain the proposition "The Bible is the word of God in human words"

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3.5 THE KINGDOM OF GOD, THE CENTRAL TEACHING OF JESUS

It is widely agreed among scholars that the theme of the 'kingdom of God' is central to the preaching of Jesus. This needs explanation. In the extraordinary wisdom of his teaching, in the holiness of his life, in the power he possessed to heal people from their ailments, both physical and spiritual, and to change people's heart from a life opposed to God and oppressive towards people to lead a new form of life in communion with God and in fellowship with one's neighbour, in the love that he showed for the humblest, the poorest and the downtrodden, the disciples of Jesus experienced that God's reign (God's Kingdom) had come among them. Jesus put the whole power of his personality and lived fully committed for the cause of God's Kingdom which is for the holistic flourishing of human life.

The mission of Jesus Christ was to bring about a renewed humanity and to establish a new society based on fundamental humane values embedded in the heart of every person. To express this mission objective, Jesus used the concept of Kingdom of God which would be easily understood in the Jewish world of his time.

The idea of God as king was common in all ancient religions. But this idea of God's kingship was very much cherished by Jews. For them Yahweh, their God, was their king who created the universe and liberated them from their slavery (forced labour) in Egypt under the leadership of

Moses. Israel's earthly kings were only God's vice-regents who were appointed to bring about the ideal kingdom of God on earth. But shattered by the utter failure of monarchy, they hoped for God's Messiah to come and to overthrow their enemies like the Roman occupying army by mighty power and establish a kingdom of justice, peace and prosperity.

When Jesus announced the arrival of God's kingdom in and through his person and action, the people of Palestine knew what he was taking about. They needed no further explanation. But Jesus corrected the political overtones of people's expectation regarding God's kingdom and its crude and crass earthly glory. Their expectations were for political conquest, display of glamour and triumphalism of the powerful. On the contrary, the basic character of the messianic kingdom would be a change of heart. It begins from an interior conversion from one's selfishness, greed and hate and to commit oneself for a new quality of life in communion with God and in solidarity with one another in the society. This would be based on a new value system of love, compassion, justice, joy and self-sacrifice for the welfare of all, beginning with the least in the society, the powerless and the poor who need immediate support, care and protection more than others.

The *beatitudes* proposed by Jesus as given in the gospels of Matthew 5:3-12; and Luke 6:20-26, is the new charter of the kingdom values. Here is the Mathew's version of the *beatitudes*:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

Blessed for those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:3-11).

Poverty and suffering so far despised as curse from God are now highlighted for the challenge they pose for Jesus' vision of the new society. Love, meekness, justice, peace, compassion and human solidarity with the suffering humanity are proposed as the most constructive values of the new order of the society modelled by Jesus in contrast to one's reliance on power, pride and inordinate dependence on wealth for one's happiness.

The kingdom theme pervades Jesus' mission

Jesus responded to the situation of Palestine by inaugurating the kingdom of God. It was the inauguration of a new way of life and a new order of society based on kingdom values of love, equality, health, happiness, peace, justice and compassion towards all by recognising the fundamental goodness of every person as a child of God and assurance of perfect happiness

hereafter. This kind of social order would be the sign that God's rule (that is, kingdom of God has come) was at work in the hearts of people and in the midst of their society.

As the profound manifestation of God's compassionate presence and saving action among people, Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, freed those were tormented by demonic powers, forgave sinners and had fellowship meal with all, especially with the marginalised ones of the society. Thus he went about establishing communities of human solidarity cutting across social barriers.

It was precisely for this reason the concept of the kingdom of God occurs frequently in the gospels – 14 times in Mark, 31 times in Luke and 33 times in Matthew. All the 45 parables of Jesus spread all over the gospels such as the stories of Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, Lazarus and the rich man, the labourers in the vineyard, Parable of the Sower, etc, explain different aspects of the kingdom. Similarly, all the miracle stories of the gospels refer to the same: the power of God's rule at work in and through the person of Jesus Christ.

Likewise, the *Lord's Prayer* – the particular form of prayer Jesus taught to his disciples – repeats the same kingdom theme. This is the prayer every Christian remembers and recites every day all over the world. The Matthew's version of this prayer reads:

“Our Father who art in heaven
Hallowed be thy name
Thy Kingdom come
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors
And lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:9-11).

God's kingdom at the cost of Jesus' death

Jesus' commitment for the cause of God's kingdom cost his life. How? The values of God's kingdom preached by Jesus attracted multitudes of people. Many became his disciples and friends and formed themselves into a community around him. He chose twelve among them to be his apostles. This has alarmed the religious and political authorities of Judaism and Roman colonial authorities in Palestine because his message of the new humanity based on the ethics of God's kingdom had the potential to subvert the socio-political and religious structures of domination and exploitation. This led them to condemn him to death on the cross, on which he died.

But on the third day his disciples and friends saw him and experienced him as raised from the dead. He empowered them with the gift of his Spirit and commanded them to go into all the world to be his witnesses, proclaim his good news and make disciples. Jesus also promised that he would be with them always to the end of the age (Matthew 28:16-20). So, at the centre of Christianity is the person of Jesus Christ – the one whom Christians believe and worship to be both truly human and truly God. The Roman cross of cruelty and death has become the universal symbol of faith, representing the sacrifice made by a loving God that the world through him

might be saved. And so the heart of the Christian message is that Jesus rose from the dead having conquered sin and death. 'The resurrection' is the term used in the Bible to refer to a series of events that took place focusing on what happened to Jesus after his death.

With the mandate of the Risen Lord, his disciples went all over the Mediterranean world and even far beyond giving witness to the good news that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the one who came to redeem us from the fear of sin and death. Some ancient traditions have it that one of the apostles of Jesus, Thomas by name, came to India, and preached the good news in some parts of South India, especially the Malabar region located in the present day Kerala where some people embraced the new faith. He was finally killed at St Thomas Mount, a hillock situated in Chennai.

3.6 CHRISTIANITY, A COMMUNITARIAN RELIGION

Christianity is essentially a community-based religion. In the New Testament the Greek term 'ekklesia' is used for the church. 'Ekklesia' denotes a group of people. It literally means 'those who are called out,' into a community of faith. The reason is that all Christians are made one in Christ, despite their multicultural backgrounds. The church, which is the body of Christian community, is the mother and teacher (*mater et magistra*) of Christian way of life and practice where Christians find the living memory of Jesus Christ alive.

Christianity sees human person as essentially a member of a community. Human being is a relational being, not an isolated island. One's salvation and well-being cannot be found in pure isolation. Salvation in Christ must include commitment to promote true human solidarity and deep communion with all people because the church is the sign of new humanity Christ desired where the bonds of friendship and love are expressed in their deepest institutional form according to the kingdom ethics.

The church is at the service of the human family after the example of Jesus Christ who "did not come to be served but to serve" (Matthew 20:28). Therefore, Pope John Paul II used to say that human person is the way of the Church because salvation and human well-being brought by Jesus Christ is meant for all people as God's children. Similarly, Pope Paul VI in his encyclical letter *Ecclesiam suam* stressed that the church was called upon to serve all people not alone but in dialogue and collaboration with all secular ideologies, faith-communities of all religious traditions and all Christian churches.

Further, the Second Vatican Council (1963-65) emphasises: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions...The Church, therefore, has this exhortation for her sons: prudently and lovingly, through dialogue with the followers of other religions, and in witness of Christian faith and love, to acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these men as well as the values in their society and culture" (*Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to non-Christian Religions*, n.2).

Divisions of Christianity

The communitarian nature of the church is not free from division. Right from the earliest centuries of its existence, Christianity has been a pluriform religion. Most of these divisions are

perceived by the mainline churches as heterodox which means as straying away from the original meaning of the Christian faith.

The first major division arose in the year 1054, known as the Great Eastern Schism (schism means division). Out of this schism, Christianity has been divided into two, Eastern Church and Western Church. The Eastern Church named itself as *Eastern Orthodox Church*, and the Western Church retained its name as *Roman Catholic Church*. The former refused to accept the central authority of the Pope over Universal Christianity. It further divided itself into many sub-groups.

Similarly, in the sixteenth century, the Protestant Reformers, Martin Luther and John Calvin separated themselves from the Roman Catholic Church and formed Lutheran and Calvinist Churches respectively. Further, the English Church separated itself from the authority of the Pope and formed the Anglican Church. These further split into hundreds of Christian denominational churches and sects. Today, Christianity in its denominational character is found all over the world. The Roman Catholic Church has continued to remain as the predominant Christian denomination in number as well as its far reaching influence. It constitutes one worldwide community united under one supreme leader, the Pope; and by a commonly held codes and beliefs on matters of faith and morals.

Basic Beliefs

The Christian faith, which is centred on Jesus Christ as the Divine Saviour of humankind, has radically changed the Christian understanding of God and human persons. The fundamental tenets of Christian beliefs are given in the 'Apostles' Creed.' Apostles' Creed contains the concise faith-statements of Christianity. It summarises the essential beliefs of the Christian faith tradition. They are the official faith-statements that preserves and transmits the doctrinal orthodoxy (which means the original doctrines) of Christianity to the future generations. It is called 'Apostles' Creed' because it originated from the apostles who had immediate contact with Jesus Christ. It is the shorter form of the Christian Creed while the Nicene Creed is its enlarged version composed and promulgated by the undivided Christian Church in First General Council of Nicaea, held in the year 325 CE. Most churches in their Sunday services recite the Apostles' Creed as given below:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried,

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,

And is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

The holy catholic Church,

The communion of saints,

The forgiveness of sins,

The resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Christian belief in God is classified as Trinitarian monotheism. This means that God is an eternal Communion of three Divine Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in such a way that they form one and only God, sharing one divine nature and one divine existence. This is the theological insight given through God's self-manifestation in Jesus Christ. This implies that God is dynamism of eternal life and love. The outflow of this inner Trinitarian life and love is the cause of all creation, the apex of which is the human persons created in the very image and likeness of God who is a communion of three divine persons (Genesis 1:26). Therefore, human persons are endowed with capacity for communion with God and with one another.

Christianity and Sacraments

Christians listen to Christ when the gospels are read. They meet him in the poor and the needy. They celebrate his saving power when sacraments are celebrated. Sacraments are the symbolic actions instituted by Christ to enable his disciples to have deeper communion with him. All Christian churches accept two sacraments, namely Baptism and Eucharist. In addition, the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox churches accept Confirmation, Reconciliation, Anointing of the sick, Marriage and Ordination to clerical ministry.

The word 'Baptism' comes from the Greek word '*baptizein*'. It means to wash or to cleanse. The sacrament of Baptism is the Christian initiation ceremony. It marks a person once for all as a member of Christ in his church.

The word 'Eucharist' comes from the Greek work '*eucharistia*', which means thanksgiving. It is also known as the Holy Mass or Holy Communion or Lord's Supper. The Eucharist is the central act of worship in all churches. Most churches celebrate it on Sundays. The Roman Catholic Church celebrates it daily.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

Christianity is founded on the person and the teaching of a historical person, Jesus of Nazareth. His disciples and friends who lived with him realised that he was more than any other religious leader. After witnessing to his service to God's kingdom, and his death and resurrection, they were enabled to acclaim him as the incarnate Son of God, the Messiah sent by God to establish divine rule of love and compassion among people. They worshiped him as God the Son.

Next to the person of Jesus Christ, the Bible has an important place in Christianity as the 'word of God.' The church is the community of Jesus' disciples where the gospel is preached and sacraments are celebrated. It is the continuation of the fellowship Jesus established with his disciples. His life giving presence in the church is celebrated especially through the sacraments. The church is not in competition with other faith-communities and secular ideologies. But Christians are called to live in dialogue and collaboration with all people of good will to establish authentic human communities, which Christians see as a sign of God's rule in the world.

Check your progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

(1) Write an essay on the communitarian nature of the Church

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.....

(2) Explain the meaning and the function of the Christian sacraments

.....
.....

3.8 KEY WORDS

Catholic: Catholic is an adjective derived from the Greek adjective *katholikos*, meaning “universal.” For Roman Catholics, the term “Catholic Church” refers to the Church in full communion with the Bishop of Rome, including both the Western particular Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches. Protestants sometimes use the term “catholic church” to refer to the entire body of believers in Jesus Christ across the world, and across the ages.

Pope: The Pope (from Latin: “papa,” or “father” from Greek “*papas*”) is the Bishop of Rome and as such is the leader of the worldwide Catholic Church.

Triumphalism: Triumphalism is the attitude or belief that a particular doctrine, religion, culture, or social system is superior to and should triumph over all others.

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3.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your progress I

1) Christianity is centred on Jesus of Nazareth, known as Jesus Christ – the one whom Christians believe to be both human and divine. Christianity is the religion of those who worship him as Son of God, the unique self-revelation of God for the salvation of the world. Mark, who seemed to have written the first gospel, begins his narrative with the following words: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1).

2) Anyone beginning to study Christianity soon realises how central the Bible is. Almost all that is known about Jesus Christ is contained in the pages of the Bible. It is one of the most widely read books in the world and has had a far-reaching impact on society and culture across the world. Countless commentaries on the Bible are available in bookstores and libraries. If one attends a Christian service of worship, one will hear a passage from the Bible read and a sermon on the passage. Bible is an essential part of Christian worship. It is the primary source of Christian way of life and action in the world. Millions of Christians all over the world begin the day with a meditation on a biblical passage.

Check your progress II

1) The New Testament begins with the *four gospels*. The gospels give an account of the life and teaching of Jesus as well as reflection on who Jesus is and what he means for the world. This is followed by the *Acts of the Apostles* that tells the story of the first thirty years of the Christian church. There are then thirteen *letters of Paul*, the persecutor of Christians who became its great missionary leader after his dramatic encounter with the Risen Jesus on the way to Damascus. His letters are written to churches and individuals of the Mediterranean region. His first letter was written within 25 years of Jesus' death. This is followed by eight other letters known as *Catholic Letters* written by early Christian leaders to various churches. And then there is the *Book of Revelation* of John which is a visionary work cast in the literary style of Jewish visionary literature, known as the apocalyptic literature. It is a book of hope addressed to the seven young churches of Asia Minor which were under severe stress on account of persecution.

2) Christians revere the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) as the Word of God. They hold that it is a divinely inspired book written in human language, subject to all human limitations.

'Inspired book' means that the Bible is not merely a great literature that brings spiritual enlightenment but that it comes from God. Inspiration does not imply that the human authors are mere passive instruments for a divine action. But it does mean that what the human authors wrote in their own language, and in their own historical and cultural setting, as directed by God so that the written text of the Bible is really the word of God in human words.

Check your progress III

1) Christianity is essentially a community-based religion. In the New Testament the Greek term '*ekklesia*' is used for the church. '*Ekklesia*' denotes a group of people. It literally means 'those who are called out,' into a community of faith. The bond of unity among Christians is not based on racial bond of birth or caste, colour, common language or culture, nor even on a uniform way of worship. Christianity sees human person as essentially a member of a community.

2) Christians listen to Christ when the gospels are read. They meet him in the poor and the needy. They celebrate his saving power when sacraments are celebrated. Sacraments are the symbolic actions instituted by Christ to enable his disciples to have deeper communion with him. All Christian churches accept two sacraments, namely Baptism and Eucharist. In addition, the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox churches accept Confirmation, Reconciliation, Anointing of the sick, Marriage and Ordination to clerical ministry.



UNIT 4

ISLAM

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- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Historical Background to the Origin and Development of Islam
- 4.3 The Life of Muhammad
- 4.4 Beliefs of Islam – The Oneness of God and the Kalima (Faith)
- 4.5 Divinity of the Quran – The Meaning and Message
- 4.6 Philosophy of Prophethood in Islam
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- 4.8 Let us Sum up
- 4.9 Key Words
- 4.10 Further Readings and References
- 4.11 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we define Islam and its historical development. The main emphasis will be on the fundamentals of the religion of Islam. We examine the essential belief system of Islam across the world with varying social and cultural contexts in order to gain an understanding of how this tradition has emerged and spread around the world posing new challenges.

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify the origin and historical development of Islam
- Identify its basic philosophical concepts and issues
- Understand the philosophy of Divine Revelation
- Recognise some ethical principles and law in Islam as a world religion
- Understand the sectarian philosophical nuances –Sunnism, Shiaism and Sufism

4.1 INTRODUCTION

It is important at the outset of our discussion that we understand something about the Islamic heritage, upon which Muslims draw for inspiration. Islam is the youngest of the major world religions. It is also the fastest growing religious tradition. In many areas of the world, including Europe and North America, the number of Muslims is increasing rapidly. In this global context, Muslims exhibit as many differences among themselves as do the other great religions of the world. However, regardless of sectarian and other kinds of divisions, Muslims share core beliefs that bind them in a worldwide community.

ISLAM – It is pronounced with the accent on the second syllable: i-SLAM. The word literally means submission, obedience, or surrender. Islam, however, is derived from Salam, the Arabic word for peace. So a literal definition Islam is “peace through submission to the will of Allah.” Islam is the name of the religion. The religion is not, as with Christianity, Buddhism, and other

religions, named after its founder. Muslim is the person who practices Islam that is a surrendered one, one who has submitted to God. One becomes a Muslim not by birth, but by confession of the faith in Islam: “There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God”. Muslim is a person who can make the twin declaration of the faith in One God and a righteous life. Hence, Islam is less a religion, as many understand the word, and more of a total way of life. Politics, art, education, daily routine, diet, and many social customs are guided by Allah and are infused with the spirit of Islam. It is thus a way of life confidently embracing this world, and a preparation for the after-life, just as confidently embracing the other world.

4.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAM

A profound right-angle turn was made in the history of religion during the nineteenth century BCE. A man named Abraham dared to challenge his father’s authority and reject his household gods. He did so in the name of a new God he had experienced. It is important here to recognise that Adam was the first in the line of prophets (Quran 3:3) and although Islam was renewed by Noah, in Abraham’s time there was much corruption of the monotheism God intended in creation. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam confess Abraham to be the “friend of God and father of the faithful” and for each of them, the history of salvation began with Abraham and his covenant with God. This shared heritage played itself out in history is interpreted differently by the three religions. The general view is that Abraham is the tribal ancestor of Israel and Arab people by way of two women, Hagar and Sarah, and two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. God made covenant with Abraham and promised him that his family and its descendants would be many and blessed. Sarah, Abraham’s wife, did not believe God could fulfil the promise since she was well past child-bearing age. So she took matters into her own hands and encouraged Abraham to take another wife, her Egyptian maid, Hagar. Abraham and Hagar had a son who was named Ishmael, that is, “God hears” or “The Lord had given heed” – presumably to Sarah’s incapacity to have children. Soon after Ishmael was circumcised at the age of 13, a second son was miraculously born to Sarah. This son was Isaac, who figures prominently in the Hebrew story. Because Sarah feared, perhaps out of jealousy, that Ismael, the first-born and legitimate heir to God’s promise, might compete with Isaac for this heritage, she with Abraham’s consent forced Hagar and Ishmael out of the household. They were banished to fend for themselves in the wilderness.

God continued to look out for Hagar and Ishmael. After travelling for days in the desert, Ishmael and Hagar were provided water by God near where the first Kaaba would be built by Abraham. Eventually, as she had hoped, Hagar saw her son marry an Egyptian woman. From that marriage came twelve sons. Many years later Ishmael and Isaac were reunified as they returned to bury their father. The history of the Middle East has been forever shaped by this interpretation of Abraham’s covenant and submission to God. On this point hangs a 4000 year-old fratricidal struggle between Israel and Islam. It also explains why Jews could not accept Muhammad as the Messiah. Islamic logic concludes that all true followers of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus are Muslims.

4.3 THE LIFE OF MUHAMMAD

One of history’s auspicious moments occurred about 570 CE in the Arabian oasis town and commercial centre of Mecca. To a young couple of the Qurasyh tribe and Banu Hashim clan was

born Muhammad ibn Abdullah. He was born on the twelfth day of the third lunar month of Islam's calendar. This Arab boy, whose name meant "the highly praised one" would grow up to have an impact on the world out of all proportion to the wealth and status of his family. Not much was expected from this orphan whose father died two months before his birth and whose mother died when he was six. He became a foster child under the care of his grandfather for a short time and after the latter's death, Muhammad was adopted by an uncle, Abu Talib. The world which his tribal community opened up to him was a colourful and exciting one of camels, caravans, and the commerce which accompanied them. Mecca provided scenes of barter, visits to the shrine of the Black Stone in the Kaaba the imaginative language of soothsayers and poets, and the sale of statues and religious mementos. His reputation, reliable character, and good name increased as he matured physically into manhood. This reputation soon reached a wealthy widow and local business woman by the name Khadija. She hired him to work with her trading company and eventually to supervise her commercial enterprise. So successful was his management of her financial affairs and so responsible was his leadership, that her company prospered beyond expectations.

His most traumatic moment came at age forty around the 27th of the month of Ramadan when he was meditating in a cave on Mt.Hira. He called it the "Night of Power" better than 1000 months ...peace until the rising of the dawn. A voice as clear and distinct as if it were a friend next to him said, "Recite in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher who created man of a clot of congealed blood! Proclaim!" (96:1-2).

Muhammad was overwhelmed. "I can't read or write". How can I do what you command?" was his natural response. He soon realized that the person speaking to him with such clarity was none other than the angel Gabriel. This encounter caused him greater anxiety. He very quickly shared the whole experience with Khadija whose opinion he had long trusted. It is important to say here that, unlike other founders of religions, such as Jesus and Buddha, Muhammad felt it perfectly natural to be a husband and father with all the duties required of parenting. In this regard, he returned to the example of Moses and Abraham and other Hebrew messengers of God, for whom it would have been unthinkable not to be married.

Khadija found her husband's religious experience credible and became his first convert. In fact, his next two converts were people he knew well – a cousin, Warakha, Zaid and Abu Bakr.

Muhammad was drawn again and again to the cave at Mt. Hira, and Gabriel kept reciting words of Allah to him. The more Gabriel spoke, the more convinced Muhammad was that he was not mad (81:19-25). He memorised the words revealed to him and then recited them to his friends, who wrote them on any piece of scrap material they could find, be it stone, leather, leaves or bone.

4.4 BELIEFS OF ISLAM

The Oneness of God: (Tawhid)

La ilaha illa Allah, wa Muhammad rasul Allah

(There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah)

Say: Allah is One, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was he begotten. None is equal to Him (112:1-4).The foundation of Islam is the uncompromising unity and oneness of God, called *Tawhid* in Arabic. Allah is beyond distinction and division and has no equal or associate. Allah is the Arabic word for "God". The un-translated usage of this Arabic term became increasingly

more common in English and other European languages since the 19th century. The concepts associated with the term Allah (as a deity) though differed from tradition to tradition. In pre-Islamic Arabia, Allah was not the sole divinity. In Islam, Allah is the pivot of the Muslim faith who is the only God, all-merciful and omnipotent, transcendent creator of the universe, and the judge of humankind. The term Allah is most likely derived from a contraction of the Arabic article al and ilhah “deity, god” to Allah meaning “the (sole) deity, God” (*ho theos nonos*).

Ways of Understanding the Concept of God

The first part of the Muslim confession of faith (the Shahada) is the basis for this concept of God in Islam. The Muslim bears witness that : “there is no god but God”. Or “no divinity but (one) Divinity”. The revealed Scripture of Islam, the Quran, is like a vast commentary on this simple statement, drawing from it all its implications for human life and thought.

This concept of the Deity is strictly monotheistic and Unitarian. God alone has absolute being, totally independent and totally self-sufficient. Whatever exists or ever could exist does so by His will. He has no “partner” either in creating the universe or in maintaining it in existence. He is Himself un-caused. The Quran tells us” “Say: He is Allah, One, the utterly Self-sufficient; He begets not, neither is He begotten, and there is nothing that is like unto Him”. It tells us also that: “When He wills a thing to be. He but says unto it –Be! And it is! He is al-Ahad, “the One”, absolute unity. This is in sharp contrast to the Christian contention of the Trinity. The One cannot be divided, nor can it be diminished or “humanised” by incarnation in any created form. God does not become His own creature, in fact He does not “become” anything: He is. Although God is One, there are many names for God. The Quran contains ninety-nine “most beautiful names of God.” (7:180). The Unity (Tawhid) of Allah is reflected in the unity of Allah’s creation and the order of the world. This especially means the unity of the human family. Brotherhood and sisterhood of all peoples is the logical consequence of the Unity of God; we are all related. This is the reason for the clarion call of all inclusiveness in Islam and the basis of its universal appeal.

The Kalima (six articles of faith): Belief in One God (Tawhid), 2. Belief in Angels, 3. Belief in the Book (Quran), 4. Belief in the Prophets, 5. Belief in the Last Day, and 6. Belief in Predestination

4.5 DIVINITY OF THE QURAN AND ITS MESSAGE

No book ever commanded as wide as deep a reverence as did Quran; none has been copied and recopied, passed from generation to generation, memorized in part or in total, recited in solemn worship as well as in market places, and school rooms as much as the Quran. Above all, no book has ever been the cause of such deep religious, intellectual, cultural, moral, social, economic, and political change in the lives of millions, or of peoples as ethnically diverse, as has the Quran (Ismail R. Al-Faruqi).

Within 28 years, under Caliphate of Uthman, the Quran was canonized into its present form. This became the authorised version and has remained the same to this day. It was at this time, as well that the numbering, titling, and ordering of chapters were added to the revelation. Quran is

divided into 114 chapters (Suras) with the longest, “The Cow,” having three verses. The word ‘sura’ really means “step” or ‘gradation” by which the believer ascends closer to Allah. “Ayat” is a sign, pointing to God’s revelation of wisdom and mercy.

Summary of Quranic Themes:

The Oneness and Unity of God

The Mercy and Compassion of God

The Authenticity of Muhammad as a Messenger of God

The Unity of the Message delivered by earlier prophets like Adam and Jesus

The Final Accountability of our deeds

The Ethical Guidance for Personal Morality and Social Justice

The Resurrection, Last Judgment, and After-Life

It is widely accepted by Muslims that Sura 2 is the Quran in miniature. In turn, the Fatiha or Sura, 1 is a distillation of Sura 2. Appropriately, Fatiha literally means “key” it opens the door to the Quran, leading us to all its basic beliefs. It serves also as the Muslim’s perfect prayer. The pervasiveness and influence of the Quran is unavoidable in the daily life of the Muslim. It is used in daily prayers, and the Friday noon-day liturgy; it is memorized and recited for devotional purposes and always heard at rites of passage and other celebrative occasions.

4.6 PROPHETHOOD OF MUHAMMAD

The humanity of Muhammad is central to Islam. He is not divine, not even the shadow of God on earth. The Prophet himself goes to great lengths to persuade us of his humanity. The Quran records that he asked forgiveness of sins. Once, Allah rebuked him for being more interested in explaining the Quran to people than helping a poor blind man (80:1-15). However, Muhammad was much more than an ordinary man, perhaps more than an Apostle. We shall examine how he was the chosen one of God.

He was chosen to receive Allah’s final revelation of scripture. Moses was given the Torah; David the Psalms, Jesus, the Gospels; and of course, Muhammad was given the Quran. The latter is the “Standing Miracle” of Islam and remains a living testimony to the religious genius of Muhammad and his sheer trust in God.

In his famous “Night Journey to Heaven” Muhammad was taken from Mecca to Jerusalem and from a rock on Mount Zion ascended to the seventh heaven. On that flight he talked with Biblical prophets such as Moses and Abraham. While there he had a glorious vision of Allah. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem enshrines the place from which Muhammad, by wings of the spirit, made his divine visitation. One practical result of this spiritual trip was Muhammad’s instruction to pray five times a day – a subsequent pillar of Islam.

According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad was foretold in Hebrew Scriptures. For many Muslim scholars, Isaiah 42 predicts the coming of a servant who is associated with Kedar one of Ishmael’s sons whose tribe survived in Arabia (Isaiah 42, 21:13-17). That servant who is to appear in Arabia is believed to be Muhammad.

Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets- the last, the final messenger from Allah (33:40). Muhammad supersedes all previous revelations and prior prophets, Jesus is considered the most significant Prophet in the Quran next to Muhammad, but Jesus is only one in a succession of Prophets, of which Muhammad is the culmination. Just as Christians seal the canon of Scriptures, that is, no more books will be added to the Bible, Islam seals forever the canon of prophethood with Muhammad. The Quran summarizes Muhammad's prophethood in this way: "Prophet we have sent you forth as a witness, a bearer of good news, and a warner, one who shall call men to Allah by His leave and guide them like a shining light" (33:45).

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. How do you see the Historical development of Islam along with the role of the prophet Muhammad?
2. What are the salient features of Holy Quran?
3. How do you see Prophet Muhammad as the real Prophet of Allah?

4.7 FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

Islam prescribes guidance for all of life; family life, individual behaviour, business transactions, social relations, how to dress, and what to eat. It is natural, then, to find prescriptions for religious obligations and practice. They are distinguishing marks of a Muslim and practiced by all Muslims of whatever sect everywhere in the world. You could say that Islam is a house built on the rock of submission and supported by these five pillars: Witness, Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving, and Pilgrimage. Though all five pillars are generally seen as a unit, and a believer must do all five, one pillar, the Shahadah, stands in the middle. It is the pillar around which all the rest revolve.

Witness to the Faith (Shahadah)

The first pillar is a profession: "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the Prophet of God." There is nothing more important than this testimony; it is sufficient for conversion and makes a Muslim a Muslim. So it is chronologically first because it is foundational and all else- the rest of the pillars, ethics, the entire Muslim's life depends on this declaration of faith, This affirmation constitutes acceptance of the whole message of Islam. Shahadah is a capsule version of the Fatiha which is an abbreviation of the Quran. There are five main elements in Islam's faith (Irran) which is subsumed under the Shahadah:

1. Belief in one God-who alone is worthy of worship;
2. Belief in angels-spiritual beings who do the will of God;
3. Belief in sacred books including Torah (Taurah) and Gospel (Injil), all inspired by God;
4. Belief in the Prophets-as examples to follow and as spokesmen of God: Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, primary among others; and
5. Belief in the Day of Judgment and Resurrection.

These words of the Shahadah are said fourteen times a day if a Muslim does all his daily prayers. It is heard at every significant occasion from birth to death and at countless times in between. The Muslim's goal is to be able to make this witness perfectly. The Shahadah has a negative aspect: "There is no God but God." It clears away any potentially idolatrous debris so the Muslims can focus on God alone and thus develop an authentic spirituality. There is also a positive dimension to the Shahadah: "And Muhammad is the Prophet of God." By this affirmation, we look to an historical example for the guidance of an ethical life. So the Witness unites the vertical and the horizontal, the spiritual and the ethical. Muhammad said: "I have brought to the world nothing more important than this."

Prayer (Salah)

Probably the visual image most non-Muslims have of Islam is rows of men in a mosque or in a large outdoor space, rhythmically bowing and prostrating in unison. This is Salat, which really means worship, of which prayer is an essential ingredient. This worshipful prayer is pure devotion; it is unconditional praise of God where nothing is asked for, nothing is sought but God alone. There are two specific words for prayer: *dua*, which refers to petitions and supplications; and *dhikr*, the word for "remembrance" used by the Sufis in mystical meditation. These prayers may be spontaneous, unrehearsed, and uttered at any time. Salat, however, is a prescribed liturgy which includes bodily movement, saying of prayers in Arabic, and recitation of the Quran, all of which are preceded by ritual ablution. Five times a day, at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and at night, the muezzin (*Muadhdhin-one* who calls, a public crier) chants the call to prayer. And then, individually, but preferably with a congregation in the mosque, Muslims gather for Salat. If a mosque is unavailable, a prayer rug may serve as a "mosque." Each rug will have a point in its design to orient the prayer to Mecca. In the absence of a prayer rug, a Muslim can pray any place that is clean. The Prophet said, "The entire earth has been made a masjid (mosque) for me." Before Salat begins, ceremonial bathing occurs at a fountain in the forecourt of the mosque. Without this ritual washing, a symbolic restoration of the believer to original purity and balance, the Salat is not valid.

Salat consists of a number of Rakat, or units of prayer. A Rakah (singular) includes certain bodily movements with accompanying words of prayer and scripture. These are learned by all Muslims at the age of seven and performed in the same manner the world over. This is how a Rakah progresses: 1. Standing facing qibla with hands raised to ears, reciting (Takbir)-Allahu Akbar or God is greatest; 2. Still standing, folding hands in front of your waist, reciting the Fatiha; 3. Bowing from the hips with hands on knees, reciting another Takbir; 4. Resuming standing position, followed by prostration (3 bodily symbol of our humility and submission to the will of God); 5. Raising your body to a silting position (a form of kneeling), saying Takbir; 6. From this position, performing another prostration, repeating Takbir; and 7. Then sitting for silent prayers, blessing God, turning your face from side to side to acknowledge your neighbours in Salam.

A prayer (Salat) consists of two to four units. Dawn salat has two; at evening there are three, and the rest of the prayer times have four each, with a total of seventeen units per day. The basic physical positions are standing, bowing, sitting (kneeling), and prostration. As we have mentioned, the Quran is always used during prayer. Any Sura or part of a Sura may be recited,

depending on the individual's preference for verses. But some of the most used passages are the Fatiha, Sura 112 (The Oneness of God), 114 (Humankind), 2:255 (the famous "Throne Verse") 24:35 (Light), and 59:22-24 (some wonderful names of God). The weekly noonday prayers on Fridays are a communal Salat. They are directed by an Imam who leads rows of men in prayer. Women may join men, but must stand in separate lines. More typically, women perform their acts of worship at home.

“Fasting” (Sawn)

Prayer and fasting, the second and third pillars, are disciplines found in every religion and Islam makes a significant place for both of them in the lives' of Muslims. Fasting is primarily reserved for the month of Ramadan. Even the most assimilated Muslim will observe this fast for the ninth month of the lunar year. In Sura 2:183-185, the Quran spells out the rationale for fasting and what is required of the Muslim during this time of self-purification. The month of Ramadan was chosen for the annual period of personal spiritual renewal because it was in the last ten days of Ramadan that Muhammad experienced his "Night of Power" and first received revelations from Allah which were to become the Quran. Ramadan punctuates the year with a holy time in much the same way prayer time sanctifies each day. There are two sides to Ramadan-one is negative (self denial) and the other is positive (appreciation for the simplest gifts of Allah-food and drink and charity for the neighbor). From sunrise to sunset for the entire twenty-nine to thirty days of the month one is to fast from food, drink (including water), gambling, sexual activity, and all sensuous pleasures (including music). One also attempts a fast from evil , thoughts and desires. Total abstinence reminds the Muslim that his or her life is one of sacrifice and a life finally dependent on God. Since the calendar is a lunar one, the ninth month of Ramadan comes at different times during the year. When it falls in winter and the days are shorter, the sacrifice is less. But one's spiritual commitment is tested when one has to fast on long summer days. Furthermore, Ramadan helps the Muslims appreciate, in a very special way, the significance of the seasons and the wondrous thing that is the universe created by Allah.

Beyond the ascetic aspect of Ramadan, there are positive goals. One is to listen to or recite the entire Quran during the month. This is made easier for the average person by having the Quran divided into thirty equal portions. Another positive goal is that fasting helps the Muslim identify with the needs of the "have-nots." So each day, a Muslim is expected to do a good deed and contribute to a charitable cause. At the end of Ramadan, there is a day of celebrating (*Eid A/Pity-Feast of the Breaking of the Fast*). It is a grand time for family reunions and gift-giving, and a holiday that children, in particular, enjoy.

Almsgiving (Zakat)

This is another example of Islam's concern for the poor, Zakat, the fourth pillar, is a kind of social security system and organized-welfare program which helps a Muslim society share its wealth and maintain an equitable society. Zakat is a tax of two-and-one-half percent of one's annual savings-what remains after personal and business expenses. This tax is beyond what one might donate to charity and the many different state taxes which become a part of a public fund to be used for the general welfare and a number of human services. Almsgiving is an act of worship, very much like prayer and fasting, and is ear marked for the poor, needy, disabled, and

other deprived people. It represents the universal religious impulse in people to share their wealth with those who are less fortunate. Zakat literally means "purification"; it purifies the giver and what is given. A Muslim leader in early Islam observed how prayer, fasting, and almsgiving were related: "Prayer carries us halfway to God; fasting brings us to the door of His praises; almsgiving procures for us admission."

Pilgrimage (Hajj)

This last pillar is the crowning experience of a Muslim's life and moves his or her heart as nothing else. Once in a lifetime, if health and material means permit, a Muslim is expected to make a religious journey to Mecca. The pilgrimage usually involves a good deal of personal sacrifice-time, effort, and perhaps a life's savings. It is imperative that money for the pilgrimage be earned by the pilgrim. A Hajj is invalid if one has to go in debt to make the trip. But for the Muslim, the journey to and presence in Mecca is the ultimate act of worship.

Hajj also allows the participant to experience the egalitarian nature and radical unity of Islam. Muslims from around the world-all classes, colors, nationalities, and races-are there in the same dress, performing the same rituals. The pilgrimage is also a foretaste of the Day of Judgment, especially as the pilgrims stand in pious devotion on the plain of Arafat near the Mount of Mercy. Hajj has the meaning of "to set out for a definite purpose" or "to visit a revered place." The rationale for pilgrimage and certain prescribed activities surrounding it are found in Suras 2:196-203 and 5:98-100. About sixty days after the end of Ramadan, the month of pilgrimage (Dhu al-Hijja) begins. During the first ten days of this twelfth month of the year, around two million Muslims will travel to Mecca. If one cannot make the trip, and the majority of Muslims do not perform Hajj, a substitute is prescribed. It is the feast of *Id al-Adha* (Feast of Sacrifice) which is performed on the tenth day of the month at home to coincide with the same feast the pilgrims are enjoying in Mecca. The feast is a one-day ceremony for prayer and, if the family or person can afford it, the sacrifice of an animal. This sacrifice remembers the ram provided to Abraham by the angel and consequently celebrates Ishmael's freedom. A portion of this sacrificial meal is given to the poor.

4.8 LET US SUM UP

As we have repeatedly noted, Islam sees itself as the fulfilment of the Jewish and Christian religions, its Quran as the apogee of Scriptures (Torah and Gospels) and its Prophet Muhammad as the Seal of all Prophethood from Jesus back to Adam. Islam completed the religion of Jesus, which Christians believe completed Jewish religion. This link of "fulfilment" of Biblical religion, scripture, and prophets is one illustration of continuity. It is to be noted that no other religion in the world until the Bahais, has made acceptance of the truth of other religious conditions for its membership. We must view Islam as a revealed religion with an authentic scripture and strong oral and written traditions. Islam is not a mixture of Arab, Jewish, Christian and Hellenistic religions. The source of Islam's absolute assurance of its validity lies in reason and revelation. One can now understand the utter loyalty Muslims have for the Quran, their undying allegiance to Allah, and the uncritical confidence in the "rightness" of their religion. Quran seeks an appropriate and practical balance between free will and predestination, Revelation and reason, this world and the next, faith and works, and human egoism and altruism.

4.9 KEY WORDS

Covenant: A covenant, in its most general sense, is a solemn promise to engage in or refrain from a specified action. More specifically, a covenant, in contrast to a contract, is a one-way agreement whereby the covenanter is the only party bound by the promise.

Predestination: Predestination is a decree by God that there are certain souls that were previously appointed to salvation.

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4.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) Belief in One God (Tawhid), Belief in Angels, Belief in the Book (Quran), Belief in the Prophets, Belief in the Last Day, and Belief in Predestination.
- 2) The Oneness and Unity of God, The Mercy and Compassion of God, The Authenticity of Muhammad as a Messenger of God, The Unity of the Message delivered by earlier prophets like Adam and Jesus, The Final Accountability of our deeds, The Ethical Guidance for Personal Morality and Social Justice, and The Resurrection, Last Judgment, and After-Life
- 3) The humanity of Muhammad is central to Islam. He is not divine or even the shadow of God on earth. However, Muhammad is much more than an ordinary man, perhaps more than an Apostle. He was chosen to receive Allah's final revelation of scripture, the Quran. In his famous "Night Journey to Heaven" Muhammad was taken from Mecca to Jerusalem and from a rock on Mount Zion ascended to the seventh heaven. One practical result of this spiritual trip was Muhammad's instruction to pray five times a day. According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad was foretold in Hebrew Scriptures. Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets- the last, the final messenger from Allah. All the above indicates that Muhammad, while not being divine or actually worshiped, is held in high esteem and venerated as the model of what every Muslim hopes to be.

Check Your Progress II

1) The first pillar is a profession: "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the Prophet of God." There is nothing more important than this testimony; it is sufficient for conversion and makes a Muslim a Muslim. The entire Muslim's life depends on this declaration of faith. This affirmation constitutes acceptance of the whole message of Islam. There are five main elements in Islam's faith (Irnan) which is subsumed under the Shahadah:

Belief in one God-who alone is worthy of worship;

Belief in angels-spiritual beings who do the will of God;

Belief in sacred books including Torah (Taurah) and Gospel (Injil), all inspired by God;

Belief in the Prophets-as examples to follow and as spokesmen of God: Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, primary among others; and

Belief in the Day of Judgment and Resurrection.

2) Among their religious worship, prayer is an essential ingredient. This worshipful prayer is pure devotion; it is unconditional praise of God where nothing is asked for, nothing is sought but God alone. Salat is a prescribed liturgy which includes bodily movement, saying of prayers in Arabic, and recitation of the Quran, all of which are preceded by ritual ablution. Five times a day, at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and at night, the muezzin (*Muadhdhin-one* who calls, a public crier) chants the call to prayer. And then, individually, but preferably with a congregation in the mosque, Muslims gather for Salat. If a mosque is unavailable, a prayer rug may serve as a "mosque." Each rug will have a point in its design to orient the prayer to Mecca. In the absence of a prayer rug, a Muslim can pray any place that is clean.

3) Hajj the last pillar is the crowning experience of a Muslim's life and moves his or her heart as nothing else. Once in a lifetime, if health and material means permit, a Muslim is expected to make a religious journey to Mecca. The pilgrimage usually involves a good deal of personal sacrifice-time, effort, and perhaps a life's savings. It is imperative that money for the pilgrimage be earned by the pilgrim. A Hajj is invalid if one has to go in debt to make the trip. But for the Muslim, the journey to and presence in Mecca is the ultimate act of worship. Hajj also allows the participant to experience the egalitarian nature and radical unity of Islam. Muslims from around the world-all classes, colors, nationalities, and races-are there in the same dress, performing the same rituals. The pilgrimage is also a foretaste of the Day of Judgment, especially as the pilgrims stand in pious devotion on the plain of Arafat near the Mount of Mercy.

BLOCK-4 INTRODUCTION

Other Religions include East Asian Religions and Tribal Religions. East Asian religions are Confucianism, Shintoism, and Taoism. **Confucianism** was founded in China by the famous philosopher, Kong Fu Zi (Confucius). It is a complex system of moral, social, political, philosophical, and quasi-religious thought that has had tremendous influence on the culture and history of East Asia. **Shintoism** is the former state religion of Japan and remains the most common name for the nation's non-Buddhist ethnic religious practices. It was formed from disparate local mythologies, beginning with the Kojiki of 712, into an imperial religion called State Shintoism that solidified in the Meiji period. It is characterized by polytheism and animism, and involves the worship of kami or spirits. **Taoism** (Daoism) refers to a variety of related philosophical and religious traditions and concepts. These traditions have influenced East Asia for over two thousand years and some have spread to the West. The word Tao means "path" or "way." Taoist ethics emphasizes the Three Jewels of the Tao: compassion, moderation, and humility. **Tribal Religions:** Among the citizens of India who are members of tribal groups, the religious concepts, terminologies, and practices are as varied as the number of tribes, but members of these groups have one thing in common: they are under constant pressure from outsiders. Most of the pressure, however, comes from the process of integration within a national political and economic system that brings tribes into increasing contact with other groups. In general, those tribes that remain geographically isolated in desert, hill, and forest regions or on islands are able to retain their traditional cultures and religions. Those tribes that make the transition away from hunting and gathering and toward sedentary agriculture find their ancient 'religions' in decay. The fourth block, having 4 units, introduces a student into knowledge of religions – of Confucianism, Shintoism, Taoism, and Tribal Religions – that will definitely widen one's horizon of thinking.

Unit 1 on "Confucianism" presents the religion as one of the most influential systems of thought in China for centuries and remains an important aspect of Chinese civilization along with the other two formal traditions, Taoism and Buddhism. Each of the three encompassed both a religion and a philosophy, centred on the worship of ancestors, personal and local deities. The central purpose of Chinese religion in general, and of Confucianism in particular, is to uphold the sacredness by maintaining harmony among human beings and between humans and nature.

Unit 2 explains "Taoism." After a brief explanation on its origin and founder, the unit expounds the sacred scriptures of this religion, its philosophy found in the doctrines and ethical teachings, and the Taoists' belief in life after death.

Unit 3 looks at "Shintoism" by surveying its origin and historical development. After explaining the sacred scriptures of this religion the unit deals with the main aspects of this religion in its teachings on Kami, creation myth and other forms of worship.

The last Unit, "Tribal Religions," explains the basic elements of the tribal religions. The first of the two parts of the unit describes the general characteristics of the tribal religions. It also analyses the need for the belief systems which are important elements of any society. It delineates the characteristics common to most of the tribal religions like God, Ghost and the

belief in Spirit and the people's relation to that spirit. The second part elucidates some of the important elements of the tribal religions in India. It elaborates the world view of the tribal religions and the inter mingling of religion and society in the tribal world.

The above given 4 units will furnish you with a general survey of Confucianism, Shintoism, Taoism, and Tribal Religions. This block provides a historical and conceptual introduction to the religious and cultural traditions of China, Japan and India with special attention to Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism and Tribal Religions. Our goal is to do more than study religions in isolation; we will also study the religious cultural lives of East Asians in their complex multiplicity. This means that we will focus especially on the reality of multiple and implicit religious philosophies at the core of these religions.



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1.0 OBJECTIVES

Confucianism is a Chinese ethical and philosophical system developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551–479 BC). It focuses on human morality and right action. And it is a complex system of moral, social, political, philosophical, and quasi-religious thought that has had tremendous influence on the culture and history of East Asia. It might be considered a state religion of some East Asian countries, because of governmental promotion of Confucian values. By the end of this Unit you are expected to understand:

- the life of Confucius
- sacred texts of Confucianism
- Confucian worldview
- cult of Confucius

- sacrificial rites and feasts
- ethical teachings
- social philosophy
- political philosophy
- views on education

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Confucianism along with the other two formal traditions, Taoism and Buddhism, has been one of the most influential systems of thought in China for centuries and remains an important aspect of Chinese civilization. Each of the three encompassed both a religion and a philosophy, centered on the worship of ancestors, personal and local deities. The central purpose of Chinese religion in general is to uphold the sacredness by maintaining harmony among human beings and between humanity and nature. The focus of Confucius in particular was on creating harmony in human society. His philosophy emphasized personal and governmental morality, correctness of social relationships, justice and sincerity. Confucius' thoughts have been developed into a system of philosophy known as *Confucianism*. The teachings and philosophy of Confucius have deeply influenced Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese and Vietnamese thought and life. Several names for Confucianism exist in Chinese:

- School of the scholars
- Teaching of the scholars
- Study of the scholars
- Teaching of Confucius

1.2 LIFE OF CONFUCIUS

Confucius (551 BC – 479 BC) was a Chinese thinker and social philosopher. According to tradition, Confucius was born in 551 BC, in or near the city of Qufu, in the Chinese State of Lu (now part of Shantung Province). Confucius is a Latinized name. His Chinese name was Kung Fut-tzu, meaning Master Kong. He was a contemporary of Gautama Buddha and lived just before the time of Socrates and Plato.

Confucius came from an aristocratic but impoverished family. His father died when Confucius was three years old, and he was brought up in poverty by his mother. Confucius married a young girl named Qi Quan at 19 she gave birth to their first child Kong Li when he was 20. Confucius is reported to have worked as a shepherd, cowherd, clerk and book-keeper. At twenty-two he became a teacher. His mother died when Confucius was 23.

Soon became a renowned teacher. Many came to study under him. Moral education was the backbone of his educational programme. He also taught his disciples how to serve as officials on all levels in government.

Confucius lived during the Chou Dynasty (1100 B.C. to 256 B.C.). At this time, the land was divided among feudal lords. The moral and social order was in a state of decay. Confucius sought a way to restore the cultural-political order. He believed that reform would come through educating the leaders in the classics and in his philosophy. He therefore sought a political position of influence, from which he could implement his principles.

Confucius is said to have risen to the position of Chief magistrate in Lu and later Minister of Justice when he was fifty years of age. According to the Historians, the neighboring state of *Qi* was worried that Lu was becoming too powerful. *Qi* decided to sabotage Lu's reforms by sending 100 good horses and 80 beautiful dancing girls to the Duke of Lu. The Duke indulged himself in pleasure and did not attend to official duties for three days. Confucius was deeply disappointed at the misbehavior and immoral life of the Duke of Lu. He resigned in protest the post as minister of justice and left the state of Lu. According to tradition, after Confucius's resignation, he began a long journey (or set of journeys) around the small kingdoms of northeast and central China. He wandered for thirteen years from state to state, only to be disappointed and saddened everywhere by a refusal to respond to his moral challenge. The *Analects* pictures him spending his last years teaching disciples and transmitting the old wisdom. Burdened by the loss of both his son and his favorite disciples he died at the age of 72 or 73.

1.3 SACRED TEXTS

The Confucian canon is almost exclusively attributed to human beings. It includes the work of founding figures such as Confucius and Mencius, and covers subjects ranging from origin of civilization and good government to the history and protocol of early dynasties. At heart of Confucian tradition are its scriptures especially the “Five Classics” and the “Four Books”.

1. The Five Classics

- a. **The Classics of Changes (I Ching):** is a collection of texts on divination based on a set of sixty-four hexagrams that reflect the relationship between Yin and Yang in nature and society
- b. **The Classics of documents (Shu Jing):** is a record of historical event, some traditionally dated to China's remote past providing lessons in moral behavior and good government.
- c. **The Classic of Poetry (Shi Ching):** is a collection of 305 poems and songs from early Chou Dynasty (1027-402 BC)
- d. **The Record of Rites (Li Ching):** consists of three books on the *Li* (Rites of Propriety), which is the basis of Confucian self-cultivation
- e. **The Spring and Autumn Annals (Ch'un Ching):** extracts from the history of the state of Lu 722-484, said to be compiled by Confucius.

2. The Four Books

- a. **The Analects (Lun Yü):** which formed part of the canon from the Han dynasty onward, is a record of Confucius' own prescriptions for an ideal society.

- b. **Mencius (Meng Tzu)**: is the work of Confucius' eponymous follower, expands the Confucius' teaching in the Analects.
- c. **The Great Learning (Hsueh)**: teaches that the first step in bringing the world into harmony is the cultivation of the individual.
- d. **The Doctrine of the Mean (Chung Yung)**: asserts that cosmos and humanity form a unity through sincere effort.

1.4 CONFUCIAN WORLDVIEW

Confucius believed, however, in the Great Ultimate (Tao), which manifests itself in the I, or change. Tao is the cause of I, and generates Yang (energy) and Yin (a passive form). Together, Yin and Yang are seen as complementary symbols of the energy and tension in a system of counter forces. Tao, or the Great Ultimate, is the first-cause of the universe, a force that flows through all life, but is not a personal being. Confucians believe that Tai Chi is the Ultimate, an integrated energy of Yin and Yang, which is evolved from Wu Chi (Void energy) and can be transformed into various forms. The ultimate source of all energy and knowledge is called Tao, which is a continuum without boundaries in time and space, infinite, formless, and luminous (I – Ching).

In Confucianism, the system of Yin and Yang was conceived as a way of explaining the universe. It is purely relative system; any one thing is either Yin or Yang in relation to some other object or phenomena, and all things can be described only in relation to each other. The Yin and Yang are the negative and positive principles of universal force. The Yin and Yang together constitute the Tao, the eternal principle of heaven and earth, the origin of all things human and divine. The Tao produced the Chi (Qi, energy or life force). Because of Tao change is possible. Change is a transforming process due to the dynamics of Yin and Yang. Change has the notion of constancy – the change itself is unchanging.

Check your progress I

Note : a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. How does Confucius explain the universe?

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1.5 THE CULT OF CONFUCIUS, TEMPLE AND WORSHIP

Confucianism has had the most enduring and profound effect over Chinese culture. As time went on, Confucius became respected as a sage, and the temples to Confucius were built as a landmark for all of China. Among them, the Temple in Qufu, the hometown of Confucius, is the most famous and the largest. It was established in 478 BC, one year after Confucius's death, at the order of the Duke Ai of the State of Lu, who commanded that the Confucian residence should be

used to worship and offer sacrifice to Confucius. The temple was expanded repeatedly over a period of more than 2,000 years until it became the huge complex currently standing.

The development of state temples devoted to the cult of Confucius was an outcome of his gradual canonisation. In 195 BC, Han Gao Zu, founder of the Han Dynasty (r. 206–195 BCE), offered a sacrifice to the spirit of Confucius at his tomb in Qufu. Sacrifices to the spirit of Confucius and that of Yan Hui, his most prominent disciple, began in the Imperial University (Biyong) as early as 241.

The state cult of Confucius centered upon offering sacrifices to Confucius's spirit in the Confucian temple. In addition to worshipping Confucius, Confucian temples also honored the "Four Correlates", the "Twelve Philosophers", and other disciples and Confucian scholars through history. The composition and number of figures worshipped changed and grew through time.

1.6 SACRIFICIAL RITES AND FEASTS

Confucianism is a man-centered religion. It focuses on rites more than prayer or divination. Of the rituals of Confucianism, the sacrificial ritual is the most fundamental because all the others are based on it. The Confucians devote sacrificial rites to those divine beings that have a beneficial relationship with human life. These divine being includes above all Heaven and Earth. The Sun, the Moon, and the Stars are also included for they give light; the wind, clouds, lightning, mountains, rivers and the sea for they support in the production food and other commodities; parents and ancestors for they bore and reared the current generation of humans; and sages and kings for they designed the model for the spiritual life of human. Communion feast is normally the integral part of the sacrificial rites that are devoted to those divine beings.

1.7 NATURE OF HUMAN

The Confucian philosophy is built on the foundational belief that human is basically good. The *Analects* state, "The Master said, 'Is goodness indeed so far away? If we really wanted goodness, we should find that it was at our side.'" Confucian disciple Mencius further develops this, stating, "Man's nature is naturally good just as water naturally flows downward." This innate goodness could be developed and actualized through education, self-reflection, and discipline. Study in the six arts, which include ceremony, music, archery, charioteering, writing, and mathematics would develop one's character.

However, despite human's natural goodness, Confucius faced reality honestly. He questioned if it was possible to ever truly attain the level of the true gentleman. Confucius stated, "I for my part have never yet seen one who really cared for goodness, nor one who really abhorred wickedness." He said of himself, "As to being a divine sage or even a good man, far be it from me to make any such claim." "The Master said, 'The Ways of the true gentleman are three. I

myself have met with success in none of them." However, if man by nature is good, why can we not attain what should be natural to us?

1.8 ETHICS

Three key principles are emphasized in Confucius' teachings: the principles of *Li*, *Yi* and *Ren*,

Li.

The term *Li* has several meanings, often translated as propriety, reverence, courtesy, ritual or the ideal standard of conduct. It is what Confucius believed to be the ideal standard of religious, moral, and social conduct. *Li* is based on three important conceptual aspects of life: ceremonies associated with sacrifice to ancestors and deities of various types, social and political institutions, and the etiquette of daily behavior. According to Confucius, *Li* is defined as propriety rites or good manners. The concept of *Li* determines how you act in a given relationship. In other words, *Li* can be viewed as a person's morality. A person's morality is responsible how they act or react to certain situations as well as how they view the world. Confucius advocates the necessity of *Li* as a stepping stone to social harmony.

Li is interpreted quite differently throughout Confucian philosophy. The founder of Confucian philosophy believes that before *Li* can be achieved, a person must have a sense of sincerity and be true to oneself (Cheng). This belief that virtue is the backbone of morality spreads even further, all the way to the social scope. Confucius' teachings reveal that a simple, secular, and unassuming attitude toward life is the root of morality. Starting from being sincere to oneself (cheng). *Li*: The Confucian theory of ethics as exemplified in *li* was believed by some that *li* originated from the heavens. Confucius's view was more nuanced. His approach stressed the development of *li* through the actions of sage leaders in human history, with less emphasis on its connection with heaven. His discussions of *li* seem to redefine the term to refer to all actions committed by a person to build the ideal society, rather than those simply conforming with canonical standards of ceremony. In the early Confucian tradition, *li*, though still linked to traditional forms of action, came to point towards the balance between maintaining these norms so as to perpetuate an ethical social fabric, and violating them in order to accomplish ethical good. These concepts are about doing the proper thing at the proper time, and are connected to the belief that training in the *li* that past sages have devised cultivates in people virtues that include ethical judgment about when *li* must be adapted in light of situational contexts.

Yi

In early Confucianism, *yi* and *li* are closely linked terms. *Yi* can be translated as righteousness, though it may simply mean what is ethically best to do in a certain context. The term contrasts with action done out of self-interest. While pursuing one's own self-interest is not necessarily bad, one would be a better, more righteous person if one based one's life upon following a path designed to enhance the greater good, an outcome of *yi*. This is doing the right thing for the right reason. More often this term is used in opposition to personal advantages or profit. It means the right principle of behavior, in contrast to egoism. It is something like a principle of justice or what action one should follow or conform to. *Yi* is based upon reciprocity.

Rén

Just as action according to *Lǐ* should be adapted to conform to the aspiration of adhering to *yì*, so *yì* is linked to the core value of *rén*. *Rén* is the virtue of perfectly fulfilling one's responsibilities toward others, most often translated as "benevolence" or "humaneness" or "goodness" and other translations that have been put forth include "authoritativeness" and "selflessness." Confucius's moral system was based upon empathy and understanding others, rather than divinely ordained rules. To develop one's spontaneous responses of *rén* so that these could guide action intuitively was even better than living by the rules of *yì*. To cultivate one's attentiveness to *rén* one used another Confucian version of the Golden Rule: one must always treat others just as one would want others to treat oneself. Virtue, in this Confucian view, is based upon harmony with other people, produced through this type of ethical practice by a growing identification of the interests of self and other.

In this regard, Confucius articulated an early version of the Golden Rule:

"What one does not wish for oneself, one ought not to do to anyone else; what one recognizes as desirable for oneself, one ought to be willing to grant to others."

The word *rén* employed in the Book of Poetry to describe noble huntsmen. Of various utterances recorded in his Analects, two remarks characterizing *rén* are fundamental: "to love humanity" and "to return to Li." Confucius sometimes views *rén* as a particular quality, along with cleverness, trustworthiness, forthrighteousness, courage and so on.

Rén as love is based on the feeling one has toward one's own parents and brothers. "Filial Piety and brotherly love are the roots of *rén*. Filial love is crucial because Confucius believes that gratitude and affection towards one's parents enables one willingly to accept parental authority and hierarchical relation between parent and child. *Rén* as love is the expansion of the roots of filial love. This expansion consists in the transferring of the family's relation of hierarchy and fraternity to the larger society. As a good father makes a good ruler, a good son makes a good subject. A man of *rén* starts loving parents, and then gradually expands circle of love. Hence, the determination that *rén* is to love humanity serves to justify the inner basis of returning to li.

When Confucius claims that *rén* is to return to li, he is asking each agent to act in conformity with social values, and thereby become accepted and respected by the society or tradition he or she is in. To be a person of *rén* is first of all to be a social person, equipped with ethical virtues.

The principle of *rén* is closely associated with another important concept: *Chun-Tzu*, the idea of the true gentleman. It is the man who lives according to the highest ethical standards. The gentleman displays five virtues: self-respect, generosity, sincerity, persistence, and benevolence. His relationships are described as the following: as a son, he is always loyal; as a father, he is just and kind; as an official, he is loyal and faithful; as a husband, he is righteous and just; and as a friend, he is faithful and tactful.

The five Relationships

Confucianism speaks of five basic human relationships. The influence of the theory of the five elements gave the impression that there should be "five relationships," "Wu lun". Confucius

believed that everyone had their role to play based on their relationship to others. If everyone fulfilled their duties and kept their place then society would be stable and harmonious. Confucius saw that five major human relationships should be governed by li, or propriety. Those relationships are:

1. Ruler and subject
2. Father and son
3. Husband and wife
4. Elder brother to younger brother
5. Friend to friend.

a. Reciprocity

Shu, or reciprocity, is seen in the five relationships as follows:

1. Benevolence in rulers, loyalty in ministers and subjects
2. Kindness in the father, filial piety in the son
3. Righteous behavior in the husband, obedience in the wife
4. Gentleness in the oldest son, humility and respect in the younger siblings
5. Humane consideration in each other.

In each of the relationships, the superior member (father, husband, etc.) has the duty of benevolence and care for the subordinate member (son, wife, etc.). The subordinate member has the duty of obedience. The only exception might be the relationship between friend and friend, which may actually involve equality -- unless, of course, one is older than the other, which would turn it into a relationship like that between older and younger brother. Confucianism also speaks of The "Six Relationships" or "Six Relations," "liù lún." They are supposed to be the basis of all social connections between persons, and all six are based on the fundamental relationship between parents and children. Thus they are all variations of "filial piety" the religious respect that children owe to their parents. The reverential attitude toward the teacher is highly emphasized in this version of six relations. Confucius says: When a man has been your teacher for a single day, you should treat him as your father for the rest of his life.

The six relations are as follows:

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Superior	Father	Husband	Elder brother	Ruler	Friend	Teacher
Subordinate	Son	Wife	Younger brothers	Subject	Friend	Student

b. Filial Piety

For Confucius and his followers, the relationship between father and son was the most important. "filial piety" - it is the important virtue. Confucius also incorporated the notion of the four classes: the scholar, the peasants, the artisans (a.k.a. craftsmen), and the lowest of the low, the merchant. Notice two things, the place of the peasant and the absence of warriors. Confucianism had no need of war, because if everyone is following their proper role then there should be no war. If there is war, then Confucianism is out the window anyway. China never glorified the

warrior as much as Japan and Europe did. Also, the class order put peasants second since they provided the food that everyone else needed to live. Artisans at least make useful things, but merchants were viewed as parasites whose only purpose was to live (and get rich) off the sweat of others' labor.

Check your progress II

Note : a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Whom did the people worship in the temples?

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.....

2. How will the society be harmonious and stable.?

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.....

1.9 CONFUCIUS' SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

Confucius' social philosophy largely revolves around the concept of *ren*, "compassion" or "loving others." Cultivating or practicing such concern for others involved deprecating oneself. This meant being sure to avoid artful speech or an ingratiating manner that would create a false impression and lead to self-aggrandizement. Those who have cultivated *ren* are, on the contrary, "simple in manner and slow of speech." For Confucius, such concern for others is demonstrated through the practice of forms of the Golden Rule: "What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others;" "Since you yourself desire standing then help others achieve it, since you yourself desire success then help others attain it." He regards devotion to parents and older siblings as the most basic form of promoting the interests of others before one's own and teaches that such altruism can be accomplished only by those who have learned self-discipline.

Learning self-restraint involves studying and mastering *li*, the ritual forms and rules of propriety through which one expresses respect for superiors and enacts his role in society in such a way that he himself is worthy of respect and admiration. A concern for propriety should inform everything that one says and does:

Look at nothing in defiance of ritual, listen to nothing in defiance of ritual, speak of nothing in defiance of ritual, never stir hand or foot in defiance of ritual.

Subjecting oneself to ritual does not, however, mean suppressing one's desires but instead learning how to reconcile one's own desires with the needs of one's family and community. Confucius and many of his followers teach that it is by experiencing desires that we learn the value of social structures that make an ordered society possible. Nor does Confucius' emphasis on ritual mean that he was a punctilious ceremonialist who thought that the rites of worship and of social exchange had to be practiced correctly at all costs. Confucius taught, on the contrary,

that if one did not possess a keen sense of the well-being and interests of others his ceremonial manners signified nothing. Equally important was Confucius' insistence that the rites not be regarded as mere forms, but that they be practiced with complete devotion and sincerity. "He [i.e., Confucius] sacrificed to the dead as if they were present. He sacrificed to the spirits as if the spirits were present. The Master said, 'I consider my not being present at the sacrifice as though there were no sacrifice.'"

While ritual forms often have to do with the more narrow relations of family and clan, *ren*, however, is to be practiced broadly and informs one's interactions with all people. Confucius warns those in power that they should not oppress or take for granted even the lowliest of their subjects. "You may rob the Three Armies of their commander, but you cannot deprive the humblest peasant of his opinion." Confucius regards loving others as a calling and a mission for which one should be ready to die.

1.10 CONFUCIUS' POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Confucius' political philosophy is also rooted in his belief that a ruler should learn self-discipline, should govern his subjects by his own example, and should treat them with love and concern. "If the people be led by laws, and uniformity among them be sought by punishments, they will try to escape punishment and have no sense of shame. If they are led by virtue, and uniformity sought among them through the practice of ritual propriety, they will possess a sense of shame and come to you of their own accord."

Most troubling to Confucius was his perception that the political institutions of his day had completely broken down. He attributed this collapse to the fact that those who wielded power as well as those who occupied subordinate positions did so by making claim to titles for which they were not worthy. In the words of Confucius "Good government consists in the ruler being a ruler, the minister being a minister, the father being a father, and the son being a son. If I claim for myself a title and attempt to participate in the various hierarchical relationships to which I would be entitled by virtue of that title, then I should live up to the meaning of the title that I claim for myself. The attitude and behavior of the ruler is very important for good government. In a conversation with Ji Kangzi (who had usurped power in Lu), Confucius advised: "If your desire is for good, the people will be good. The moral character of the ruler is the wind; the moral character of those beneath him is the grass. When the wind blows, the grass bends."

For Confucius, what characterized superior governing was the possession of 'virtue.' Conceived of as a kind of moral power that allows one to win a following without recourse to physical force, such 'virtue' also enabled the ruler to maintain good order in his state without troubling himself and by relying on loyal and effective deputies. Confucius claimed that, "He who governs by means of his virtue is, to use an analogy, like the pole-star: it remains in its place while all the lesser stars do homage to it." The way to maintain and cultivate such royal 'virtue' was through the practice and enactment of *li* or 'rituals'—the ceremonies that defined and punctuated the lives of the ancient Chinese aristocracy.

1.11 CONFUCIUS AND EDUCATION

A hallmark of Confucius' thought is his emphasis on education and study. He disparages those who have faith in natural understanding or intuition and argues that the only real understanding of a subject comes from long and careful study. Study, for Confucius, means finding a good teacher and imitating his words and deeds. A good teacher is someone older who is familiar with the ways of the past and the practices of the ancients. While he sometimes warns against excessive reflection and meditation, Confucius' position appears to be a middle course between studying and reflecting on what one has learned. "He who learns but does not think is lost. He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger." Confucius, himself, is credited by the tradition with having taught altogether three thousand students, though only seventy are said to have truly mastered the arts he cherished. Confucius is willing to teach anyone, whatever their social standing, as long as they are eager and tireless. He taught his students morality, proper speech, government, and the refined arts. While he also emphasizes the "Six Arts" -- ritual, music, archery, chariot-riding, calligraphy, and computation -- it is clear that he regards morality the most important subject. Confucius' pedagogical methods are striking. He never discourses at length on a subject. Instead he poses questions, cites passages from the classics, or uses apt analogies, and waits for his students to arrive at the right answers. "I only instruct the eager and enlighten the fervent. If I hold up one corner and a student cannot come back to me with the other three, I do not go on with the lesson."

Check your progress III

Note : a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What is Rén?

.....

2. What is the basis of Political philosophy of Confucianism?

.....

1.12 LET US SUM UP

Although Confucianism may include ancestor worship, sacrifice to ancestral spirits and an abstract celestial deity, and the deification of ancient kings and even Confucius himself, all these features can be traced back to non-Confucian Chinese beliefs established long before Confucius. Generally speaking, Confucianism is not considered a religion by Chinese or other East Asian people. Part of this attitude may be explained by the stigma placed on many "religions" as being superstitious, illogical, or unable to deal with modernity. Many Buddhists state that Buddhism is not a religion, but a philosophy, and this is partially a reaction to negative popular views of religion. Similarly, Confucians maintain that Confucianism is not a religion, but

rather a moral code or philosophic worldview. There is a much more blurred line between religion and philosophy in non-Western thought. Most of the Western distinction is in fact a relatively recent phenomenon, resulting from the Enlightenment period unique to Western Europe. Most scholarly, comprehensive definitions of religion account for this cultural difference. Therefore, it could be said that while Confucianism is not a religion by Western standards (even according to Asian adherents), it is a religion in the East Asian sense of the word. If religion is by definition worship of supernatural entities, the answer must be that Confucianism is not a religion. If, on the other hand, a religion is defined as a belief system that includes moral stances, guides for daily life, systematic views of humanity and its place in the universe, etc., then Confucianism most definitely qualifies. As with many such important concepts, the definition of religion is quite contentious.

1.13 KEY WORDS

Value: In ethics, value is a property of objects, including physical objects as well as abstract objects (e.g. actions), representing their degree of importance.

Virtue and Values: Virtues can be placed into a broader context of values. Virtue is the core of underlying values or fundamental value that contributes to our system of beliefs, ideas and / or opinions.

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1.15 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your progress I

1. In Confucianism, the system of Yin and Yang was conceived as a way of explaining the universe. It is purely relative system; any one thing is either Yin or Yang in relation to some other object or phenomena, and all things can be described only in relation to each other. The Yin and Yang are the negative and positive principles of universal force. The Yin and Yang together constitute the Tao, the eternal principle of heaven and earth, the origin of all things human and divine. The Tao produced the Chi (Qi, energy or life force). Because of Tao change is possible. Change is a transforming process due to the dynamics of Yin and Yang. Change has the notion of constancy – the change itself is unchanging.

Check your progress II

1. The state cult of Confucius centered upon offering sacrifices to Confucius's spirit in the Confucian temple. In addition to worshipping Confucius, Confucian temples also honored the "Four Correlates", the "Twelve Philosophers", and other disciples and Confucian scholars through history. The composition and number of figures worshipped changed and grew through time.

2. Confucianism speaks of five basic human relationships. The influence of the theory of the five elements gave the impression that there should be "five relationships," "Wu lun". Confucius believed that everyone had their role to play based on their relationship to others. If everyone fulfilled their duties and kept their place then society would be stable and harmonious. Confucius saw that five major human relationships should be governed by li, or propriety.

Check your progress III

1. Confucius' social philosophy largely revolves around the concept of *ren*, "compassion" or "loving others." Cultivating or practicing such concern for others involved deprecating oneself. This meant being sure to avoid artful speech or an ingratiating manner that would create a false impression and lead to self-aggrandizement. Those who have cultivated *ren* are, on the contrary, "simple in manner and slow of speech." For Confucius, such concern for others is demonstrated through the practice of forms of the Golden Rule: "What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others;" "Since you yourself desire standing then help others achieve it, since you yourself desire success then help others attain it." He regards devotion to parents and older siblings as the most basic form of promoting the interests of others before one's own and teaches that such altruism can be accomplished only by those who have learned self-discipline.

2. Confucius' political philosophy is also rooted in his belief that a ruler should learn self-discipline, should govern his subjects by his own example, and should treat them with love and concern. "If the people be led by laws, and uniformity among them be sought by punishments, they will try to escape punishment and have no sense of shame. If they are led by virtue, and uniformity sought among them through the practice of ritual propriety, they will possess a sense of shame and come to you of their own accord."

UNIT 2

TAOISM

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Origin
- 2.3 Founder
- 2.4 Sacred Scriptures
- 2.5 Doctrines
- 2.6 Ethical Teachings
- 2.7 Sects
- 2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.9 Key Words
- 2.10 Suggested Readings and References
- 2.11 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we explain about the Taoist religion. After a brief explanation on its origin founder, we see the sacred scriptures of this religion. We will deal with the philosophy of this religion in the doctrines and ethical teachings which we will look in detail. We also will deal with their belief in life after death.

By the end of this unit you will be enabled to:

- Have an overall picture of Taoism
- The historical origin, the founder
- The Sacred Scriptures of Taoism and its important teachings
- The doctrines of Taoism with the special emphasis on an understanding of Tao
- The ethical teachings with its positive and negative impacts
- Their view of life after death
- And the present state of Taoism with its sects.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Taoism refers to a variety of related philosophical and religious traditions and concepts. These traditions have influenced East Asia for over two thousand years and some have spread to the West. The word Tao (Dao) means “path” or “way,” although in Chinese folk religion and philosophy it has taken on more abstract meanings. Taoist propriety and ethics emphasize the Three Jewels of the Tao: compassion, moderation, and humility. Taoist thought generally focuses on nature, human-cosmos correspondence, health, longevity, effortless action, liberty, immortality and spontaneity. Reverence for ancestor spirits and immortals are also common in popular Taoism. Organized Taoism distinguishes its ritual activity from that of the folk religion, which some professional Taoists view as debased. Chinese alchemy (including Neidan), astrology, cuisine, several Chinese martial arts, Chinese traditional medicine, fengshui, and many

styles of *qigong* breath training disciplines have been intertwined with Taoism throughout history.

2.2 ORIGIN

Scholars in recent times express their doubt about whether Taoism is only a philosophy or a religion. A scholar in Chinese language writes: “There is not a word in the *Tao-Teh-Ching* of the sixth century B.C. that savors either of superstition or religion” (Legge, *The Religions of China*, p.164). Taoism was not an organized, institutionalized religion in the earlier days. It was not considered as religion at all until the Han dynasty in China, shortly before the Christian era. Today it seems to be a dead religion because it has been steadily in decline for a long time. Though it has not yet disappeared, there is very little likelihood that it will come back. According to a Chinese scholar: “There is no doubt that Taoism is approaching extinction.”

2.3 FOUNDER

Lao-Tze is a prophetic leader and philosopher who founded Taoism and popularized it. Lao-Tze was not really a name. It is an appellation of “Old Boy” or “Old Philosopher”. There is hardly anything known about this humble mystic, Lao-Tze. The probable date of him is 604 – 517 B.C. He was the first among the teachers to teach the principle of universal good. The main source of our information about his teaching, is the short sketch of 248 Chinese words written by Ssu-ma Chien about 500 years later.

Lao-Tze was born in the province of Honan – central China about fifty years before Confucius. Some do not even regard him as a historical figure. Some scholars fix the date of his birth in the late 7th or early 6th century. Some even say that he belongs to 4th century. According to the older chronology of China, Lao-Tze was an older contemporary of Confucius and therefore Taoism is older than Confucianism. He was a librarian, recorder and historiographer at the court of the dynasty of Chou. One account of his official position and great learning he was visited by Confucius who wanted to make a research in the ancient history of China. Taoism is ascribed to him because of his famous book *Tao-Teh-Ching* (*Tao-Te-King*). He was a contemporary to Confucius, Zoroaster, Mahavira, Buddha and prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah. He was known as “the Venerable Philosopher” due to his great learning. Later he was divinized and sacrifices were offered to him.

2.4 SACRED SCRIPTURES

In the history of the World Religions there are few exceptions where the Sacred Scriptures are written down personally by the founder himself. It is said that *Tao-Teh-Ching* was personally written by Lao-Tze. Perhaps it is the shortest Scripture because it contains only five thousand and odd words. According to the tradition, Lao-Tze spent most of his time in Chou but when he saw the corruption of Chou, he resigned and departed. At the frontier the customs officer requested him to write a book. Lao-Tze wrote a book in which he discussed the concepts of reason and virtue. Then he departed.

There are several translations of the title *Tao-Teh-Ching*. Usually it is left as it is in its original form. The translations are: *The Classic of Tao and of Virtue*, *The Book of the Path of*

Virtue, The Providential Grace Classic, The Principle of Nature and Its Attributes, Thoughts on the Nature and Manifestations of God, The Way and Its Power, The Book of Tao. Perhaps the simple and exact translation may be *Canon of Reason and Virtue*. These show that there is no exact translation.

The original name consists of three Chinese nouns. The word *Tao* is the most difficult to translate. It can mean “the Way” or “the Path”. These two meanings appear to be the most appropriate. It is also translated as “reason”, “nature”, “God” and “the word”. The word *Teh* means “Virtue” and *Ching* (*King*) can mean book, classic or canon.

The content of *Tao-Teh-Ching* is a series of unsystematically arranged generalizations and counseling spread out in 81 brief chapters. The chapters 20, 67 and 70 contain some autobiographical allusions. There are some general references to the contemporary social situation but there are no historical references at all. There are no references to a person or event.

However its intrinsic value can never be overlooked. Its style is very simple and clear. Yet it surpasses the latest teachings of philosophy and science. Its presentation, analysis, teachings and methods are really thought provoking. The work as such is very lofty, vital and restful. It is a presentation of mystical and universal wisdom. It teaches the true wisdom of appearing foolish, the success of appearing to be a failure, the strength of weakness, the advantage of being humble, the benefit of yielding to one’s adversary and the futility of contending for power. Its philosophy of the rhythm of life is simply beyond match. This philosophy is expressed in sharp contrast to Confucianism.

Its content is also similar to Buddhists *Tripitaka* in many ways and there are 268 parallels between the verses of *Tao-The-Ching* and *the Bible*. It also deals with three kinds of purity.

- Jade (ornament) purity of saints
- Highest purity of those who unite with Tao.
- Greatest purity of immortals.

Besides *Tao-Teh-Ching* there are two other sacred books.

a). *Chuang-Tzu-Ching*, the book written by Chung –Tzu a faithful disciple of Lao-Tze after two hundred years. The primary reason for this is that the teaching of Lao-Tze was eclipsed by a revival of Confucianism. The bold activism of Confucius was in sharp contrast to the passivism of Lao-Tze, expressed in his fundamental principle, *wu-wei* or non-action. To counteract this, Chung-Tzu came to the defense of the man he had so admired. He wrote extensively, setting forth in fresh terms what his master taught and to some extent went beyond his teacher. He was a brilliant writer and he is known for his brilliance, style and depth. This part of the Sacred Scripture is delightful to read. It is propound in its presentation with a powerful influence and effect upon Chinese literature, art and social life. Therefore it constitutes an important part of the Sacred Scriptures of Taoism

b). *Tao-Tsang (Tai-Shang-Kang-Ying Pien) – Tractate of Actions and Their Retributions*, is another part of the Sacred Scripture which was written in its present form much later, as late as 1436 A.D. The reason is that its original canon was longer and many of its volumes were destroyed by Kublai Khan in 1281 A.D. Its ethical teachings are held in high esteem which are unsurpassed by any other non-Christian religions. It also contains some trivial and important commands.

2.5 DOCTRINES

Tao: Meaning and Significance

This is the central concept or doctrine of Taoism. The etymological meaning is Way, Path or Road. The same Chinese word in its simplest and non-technical meaning occurs in Shinto or *Shintao* meaning “The Way of the Gods”. Confucianism uses it as a way of life or method of life.

In Taoism there are at least three different principal meanings which are developed from the primary word “way”. The first meaning is the moral and physical order of the world. It is a principle, which underlies and controls the world order. In this sense it is closer to *Rta* in the Vedas. The second meaning is that it is the path of reason (logos) or the path of truth. In its third meaning it is the way of perfect virtue or the right way of life which Heaven approves and which Heaven itself follows. Thus it is a divine principle and not just the way that man follows.

Among all these meanings the term Tao in its highest technical meaning designates the philosophical Absolute and the religious Supreme Being. In this sense several shades of meanings are given to it – such as Reason, Providence and God. The French translation uses Supreme Being, Reason, Word and Logos to represent the Chinese Tao

Tao is Indescribable

In spite of all these meanings, Tao seems to be beyond description. As a matter of fact there is no appropriate description. We can have only closely interrelated and always obscure descriptions. The best way to understand Tao is to know it in the context it is used. Outside the context it may mean something else. Since the writing itself is highly mystical, the word is used in paradoxes. For example it is clearly stated that the Tao which can be expressed is not the eternal Tao.

“The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name.”(*TTC*. 1.1)

But there are many attempts to express it. It is described as the origin of all things. It is the mystic mother. It can never be exhausted. It is a stabilizing force, for where Tao is equilibrium is. It is invisible and intangible, yet there are forms, substance and essence in it. It is inherent and natural, motionless and fathomless. It stands alone and never changes, pervades everywhere (*TTC*. 34.1). It existed before heaven and earth. It is supreme. Heaven follows its laws, but it follows the laws of its intrinsic nature. Tao has its own Tao. It is ever inactive, yet there is nothing that it does not do (*TTC*. 37.1). It is the nameless and primordial simplicity (*TTC*. 32.1). It is eternal. The great way of Tao is very plain and easy (*TTC*. 53. 2). Tao is the source of all things, the treasure of good men, and the sustainer of bad men (*TTC*. 62.1). As Tao is to the world, so are streams and valleys to rivers and seas. It does not contend, yet it surely wins the victory. It does not speak, yet it surely responds (*TTC*. 72. 2).

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Point out the central teachings of *Tao-Teh-Ching*?

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.....
2) Discuss the important meanings of the term Tao
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.....
.....
.....

Tao is the Supreme Principle

By this we must understand that Tao is the primary universal principle. It is original, primeval, before heaven and earth, the ultimate, still, formless, unchanging and nameless. (*TTC*. 25. 1-2)

It is also the primary principle of the harmony with the universal principle itself. This principle, this harmony and the ability to achieve this harmony is innate in every man. This innateness, this nature and this ability to find the way, the living “word” is man’s Tao. Just like the *Upanishads* found the impossibility of expressing (*neti, neti*) all the attributes of *Brahman* by a single name, so also it is impossible to describe Tao in any single word or phrase.

To illustrate this impossibility of describing Tao, we find three phrases used in one passage of the *Tao-Teh-Ching*: “The Tao of heaven”, “The Tao of man” and “The Tao of the sage”. In this regard any attempt to describe Tao in one single word would be a failure to understand the real nature of Tao.

In order to understand what Tao means in three different contexts, we must first understand the word “heaven”. In Chinese language the word for heaven is *Tien*. But the actual meaning of *Tien* is not “heaven” in the sense of paradise as it is used in other religions especially in Christianity. It means “the divine order which rules the universe” i.e. Tao itself in one of its meanings. If we keep this in mind we can find the true meaning of Tao in the above passage.

There is a contrast between the way of man and way of heaven. But there is a harmony between the sage and the divine order. The divine force which is within the sage due to the harmony which he has achieved acts but never contends.

Thus the passage can mean different things to different people. The understanding of Tao depends on the perception of Tao by each individual. If Tao is profound and obscure then its meaning depends upon the Tao of the perceiver.

Tao and Creation

In reference to creation, Tao is described as the *Mother of all things* (*TTC*. 1.1) because it issues the material things. Perhaps it comes close to the concept of great mother goddess of Mediterranean World. But there is a clear indication in the *Tao-Teh-Ching* about the traces of older religion when it says the gate of the female is the origin of all things. “Its gate, from which at first they issued forth, is called the root from which grew heaven and earth.” (*TTC*. 6.1) This refers to the earth or water goddess who gave birth to all things and took them back after death. This is interpreted as “the passing from not-being to being”. In this sense being originates from not-being and therefore all things return back to not-being. Consequently Tao is the source of all things and all things return back to Tao.

Here the essential feature of Tao is *Wu-Wei*: non-action or passivity. It means a kind of letting oneself or submission to one's own nature. The most characteristic single phrase in Taoism is "wu-wei" i.e. do- nothing or non-striving or inactivity. Only quiet non-striving is successful.

"The kingdom is a spirit-like thing, and cannot be got by active doing." (*TTC*. 29.1)

The nature acts through non-acting. It is effortless in its dynamism. For example water yields and flows to humble places but most powerful substance by its very inertia. Mother of all things is therefore the symbol of the power of passivity. The Tao is indeed ineffable (indescribable) and invisible but at the same time the origin of every thing.

But how this is possible? Taoism gives a concrete example: "All in the world know the beauty of the beautiful and doing this they have (the idea) of what ugliness is..." (*TTC*. 2. 1). In this sense rest is prior to motion and tranquility to action (See the opposites in *TTC*. 2.2).

Teh or Virtue

The literal meaning of *Teh* is Virtue. It can also mean Power or *Shakti*. By nature Tao is emptiness, not-being and above all non-action. This does not mean it is powerless or without efficacy. *Teh* signifies its efficacy. Tao though passive acts through its *Teh*. In this sense it is the *Mana* or the mysterious power. Due to this though Tao is not-being it does not mean it is nothing. On the contrary it is the potentiality of all beings. It only appears as non-being but it is all-pervading and Creative. In itself it is weak and humble but through *Teh*, it is strong and active. It is restful and peaceful but through its *Teh* it is creative and governs all things.

"All things are produced by the Tao and nourished by its overflowing operation" (*TTC*. 51. 1).

Teh can also be described as the prolongation of Tao. Tao which is empty and void becomes manifest through its *Teh*. Tao which is One when manifested through *Teh* becomes the multiplicity of beings. Tao becomes the unifying One through the power of *Teh*. It is *Teh* which causes all existing beings to be linked to an underlying unity. The *Teh* in things is always that which turns from outward to inward.

Supreme Being

At times Tao is also described as "supreme being" "the Absolute", "*Yu-Huang*" (pure majesty) and "*Tien-Shih*" (celestial master). Does this mean that Tao is personified and identified with God? Tao by its very nature is essentially one, eternal and impersonal principle like the *Brahman* of the *Upanishads* or as the *Nirguna Brahman* of Shankara in the *Advaita Vedanta*. Yet Tao is described as the mystical Supreme Being. There is only one occurrence to the personal designation *Ti* in the whole of *Tao-teh-Ching* which means literally "Ruler". *The Sacred books of the East* render this as God.

However, this does not mean there is a supreme being apart from Tao. Tao can be described as personal but this does not authorize anyone to identify Tao and God. Tao is the originator of all life and therefore it cannot be lifeless and abstract. Tao is conceived as One and this One became the first personification of Tao. Tao is thus worshipped as the first and greatest God of Taoism. During the first Han Dynasty (206 – 8 B.C.) this "Greatest One" was officially worshipped. Later

He came to be known as “Celestial Venerable of the Mysterious Origin” and finally as “Pure August”.

In the 3rd century A.D., He was enlarged into a Trinity. The reason is that Tao emanated itself into creation in three stages and each stage was personified. The first is “Celestial Venerable of the Mysterious Origin”. The second is “August Ruler of the Tao” and the third is “August Old Ruler” which refers to Lao-Tze.

However there is no definite form of worship of offering sacrifices to a personal God. Hence Taoism is not a religion of rituals and sacrifices. Yet Lao-Tze is divinized and temples are dedicated to him. He is venerated as the “venerable philosopher” and sacrifices were offered to him. In 156 A.D. the state itself officially ordered to offer sacrifices to him. The dogma of a supernatural conception was started in the 4th century A.D. and later he was canonized as “the Great Sage Ancestor”. But Lao-Tze did not teach a personal Supreme Being. What he taught to believe in and follow the principle of universal goodness. He who does so is divine. Yet millions of his followers in China have recognized in their great sage and religious teacher an actual manifestation of the Divine Being.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Explain the relationship between Tao and Creation ?

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2) Discuss the role of *Teh* or virtue in Taoism

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2.6 ETHICAL TEACHINGS

Ethical Ideal

The aim of life is to attain harmony with Tao. In order to do so, one must forsake all activism and retire within oneself. It is an inner participation, a sort of oneness or mystical union or harmony with the eternal Tao. Unlike Confucian social harmony, Taoism is an ideal Heavenly Harmony. One should become a “perfect” individual. This is possible only through “doing nothing, non-striving or inactivity”. Therefore the ideal is to become like Tao - peaceful and harmonious and consequently a blessed life after death.

This ideal is spelled out as a quiet, restful, simplicity like heaven itself. Tao is calm and peaceful and therefore ethical life consists in becoming calm and peaceful. There are at least eight Chinese synonyms which are used to describe the abiding admirable quietude of the eternal Tao and of the perfect individual. In all this humility is repeatedly stressed.

The humble man is a good man. Often he is well appreciated because of his lowliness and his intrinsic goodness. In this sense every one must be inspired with the friendly desire to love and do good to one another. When one is sincere in one's purpose, the others will be happy. One who is in harmony with Tao becomes friendly to everything.

Ideal of Inaction

In spite of these positive ethical ideals in Taoism, there are certain negative attitudes which are very disturbing. Lao-Tze certainly gave certain noble ideals but he did not become an ideal person in certain respect. Lao-Tze lamented over certain social evils but he did not show the way out to meet these social evils. *Tao-Teh-Ching* mentions the following: "the poverty of the people", "the greater disorder", "crafty dexterity", "thieves and robbers". (TTC. 57.2). Instead of facing these social evils, he only gave some sage advice and walked away withdrawing from the difficult situation and did not organize a reform.

The perfect individual is also chiefly portrayed as placid, self-contented and indifferent towards all people. This is just the opposite of the ideal of *Bodhisattva* in Buddhism. The ethical ideal here appears to be indifference and irresponsibility. What is said is to aim at extreme disinterestedness and maintain the utmost possible calm.

"The sage... keeps his mind in a state of indifference to all." (TTC. 49. 3)

Return to the state of natural simplicity, which is contentment, without war, government, writing, travel or fear of death.

Therefore the ethical ideal is also presented in a negative way. There is no adequate recognition of social evils of the world. There is no proper appreciation of physical facts and resources. The over emphasis on inactivity (*wu-wie*) belittles the human effort and as a consequence, the mostly negative advice shows a lack of a commanding principle for enthusiastic living. There is a lack of any moral principle to work for the uplift of the society. It appears that the advice is to return to the uncivilized simplicity. Finally there is a relapse into polytheism, demonolatry and practice of magic.

Belief in After Life

Life after death or belief in immortality or eternal life is one of strongest foundations of every religion. We see in Confucianism there is nothing concerning the belief in immortality. It emphasizes on present life and how to attain social harmony, yet it includes certain rules for the observance of the ancestor cult which implies belief in an ongoing life.

But Taoism as a religion has a great deal to say about the life after death. Certainly there is a doubt whether this belief grew originally out of the teaching of Lao-Tze or later. The scholars are of the opinion that it was primarily due to the influence of Buddhism, the belief in life after death came into existence in China. As a matter of fact, the belief in immortality is practically absent in the native religions of China and this is one of the reasons which made Buddhism so welcome to the Chinese people.

It appears that Taoism gradually came to place a very strong emphasis on the life hereafter. If Confucianism laid emphasis on this present social and this-worldly sanctions in its ethical ideals, Taoism invoked other-worldly sanctions. It believes in the form of numerous heavens and hells which rewarded the good and punished the evil conduct. One of the most prominent features of Taoism is that its temples are the physical representation of the fate, especially of the evil ones after death. These temples graphically present all the possible methods of torture. Perhaps this is a stern warning against those who indulge in all kinds of evil practices.

However we do not hear something outstanding about the life after death in Taoism. Some scholars are of the opinion that its doctrines concerning immortality are inadequate. It emphasizes only on a protracted or continued physical existence here on earth. The fundamental reason is rooted in the very culture of China. The Chinese people always believed that immortality means physical immortality. As a consequence, all rituals, cults, sacrifices, ethical ideals, charms and magic are concentrated on how to live a long undisturbed life or a life of tranquility.

Before Buddhism was introduced in China the concept of spiritual immortality was totally unknown. The physical immortality means a change into a body which is made of more durable or lighter material than the one we have in normal life. According to this belief, man after death leaves his old body as a snake sheds off its old skin and soars off to the spheres of happiness.

This physical longevity was achieved both by religious practices such as the observation of commandments, moral conduct, prayer and incantations and physical practices such as diets, medicines, chemicals, breathing methods and gymnastics.

Since immortality was taught in terms of physical immortality, so also paradise or heaven was conceived in terms of this world. They are known as "Blessed Islands". Three such islands are mentioned: Peng-lai, Ying-chou and Fu-sang. Every one was immortal in these islands. The birds and animals were pure white. The palaces and gates are of pure gold and silver. Kun-lun Mountain is also considered as the abode of the immortals.

Belief in Yin – Yang

These two are primeval interacting complementary principles. The harmony of the universe depends on these principles. *Yin* is negative, female, dark and the earth. *Yang* is positive, male, light and heaven. Nature was considered as a single intricately balanced organism which undergoes continuous alterations and man had to learn to respond correctly. Thus actual living process of living depends on the harmonious blending of the *Yin* and *Yang*. *Yin* is considered as the source of darkness and death and *Yang* as the source of light and life.

2.7 SECTS

I-Kuan Tao - mainly stressed on unity of Tao and believed that cosmic prosperity and calamity follows one another.

Tao-Teh Sheh - Society of Tao. They preached a kind of community between heaven and men. Within oneself, it is an inner participation, a sort of oneness.

Unlike in other religions, the sects in Taoism do not differ radically. Today it appears that Taoism as a cult is deteriorating rapidly because for a long period there had been no priest,

philosopher or teacher in Taoism. But there is no doubt that Taoism as philosophy will always remain.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What are the ethical ideals in Taoism?

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2) Discuss life after death in Taoism

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2.8 LET US SUM UP

Taoism is one of the three great religions of China. Its fundamental doctrine is Tao which is diametrically opposed to Confucian Tao. To begin with Taoism was not an organized religion. The founder Lao-Tzu is known as “Venerable Philosopher” or “Heavenly Teacher”. The primary text *Tao-Teh-Ching* teaches that Tao is the source of everything. It is beyond description and yet it is described in many ways. The most specific feature is it is active through non-action. Moral life consists in attaining harmony with Tao. Yet it does not offer any specific moral code, especially the way to uproot the social evils. Its emphasis on the ideal of indifference and irresponsibility appears to be negative approach to human life. Therefore it has been steadily in decline and in all likelihood it will not be revived. Yet its teachings are very powerful and have lasting effects

2.9 KEY WORDS

Alchemy: Alchemy is both a philosophy and a practice with an aim of achieving ultimate wisdom as well as immortality, involving the improvement of the alchemist as well as the making of several substances described as possessing unusual properties. The practical aspect of alchemy generated the basics of modern inorganic chemistry, namely concerning procedures, equipment and the identification and use of many current substances.

Creation: Creation refers to a divine act by which the universe was brought into existence without the help of any pre-existing material thing.

Paradox: A paradox is a statement or group of statements that leads to an apparent contradiction that actually expresses a non-dual truth.

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2.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. The most important of Taoist scriptures is *Tao-Teh-Ching*. The content of *Tao-Teh-Ching* is a series of unsystematically arranged generalizations and counseling spread out in 81 brief chapters. The chapters 20, 67 and 70 contain some autobiographical allusions. There are some general references to the contemporary social situation but there are no historical references at all. There are no references to a person or event.

However its intrinsic value can never be overlooked. Its style is very simple and clear. Yet it surpasses the latest teachings of philosophy and science. It is a presentation of mystical and universal wisdom. It teaches the true wisdom of appearing to be foolish, the success of appearing to be a failure, the strength of weakness, the advantage of being humble, the benefit of yielding to one's adversary and the futility of contending for power. Its philosophy of the rhythm of life is simply beyond match. Its content is also similar to Buddhists *Tripitaka* in many ways and there are 268 parallels between the verses of *Tao-The-Ching* and *the Bible*. It also deals with three kinds of purity.

- Jade (ornament) purity of saints
- Highest purity of those who unite with Tao.
- Greatest purity of immortals.
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2. The word *Tao* is the most difficult to translate. It can mean "the Way" or "the Path". These two meanings appear to be the most appropriate. It is also translated as "reason", "nature",

“God” and “the word”. *Tao* is the central concept or doctrine of Taoism. The etymological meaning is Way, Path or Road. The same Chinese word in its simplest and non-technical meaning occurs in Shinto or *Shintao* meaning “The Way of the Gods”.

Check Your Progress II

1. In reference to creation, Tao is described as the *Mother of all things* (TTC. 1.1) because it issues the material things. Perhaps it comes close to the concept of great mother goddess of Mediterranean World. In Taoism being originates from not-being and all things return back to not-being. Consequently Tao is the source of all things and all things return back to Tao.

2. The literal meaning of *Teh* is Virtue. It can also mean Power or *Shakti*. By nature Tao is emptiness, not-being and above all non-action. This does not mean it is powerless or without efficacy. *Teh* signifies its efficacy. Tao though passive acts through its *Teh*. In this sense it is the *Mana* or the mysterious power. Due to this, though Tao is not-being it does not mean that it is nothing. On the contrary it is the potentiality of all beings. It only appears as non-being but it is all-pervading and Creative. In itself it is weak and humble but through *Teh*, it is strong and active. It is restful and peaceful but through its *Teh* it is creative and governs all things.

Check Your Progress III

1 The aim of life in Taoism is to attain harmony with Tao. In order to do so, one must forsake all activism and retire within oneself. It is an inner participation, a sort of oneness or mystical union or harmony with the eternal Tao. One should become a “perfect” individual. This is possible only through “doing nothing, non-striving or inactivity”. Therefore the ideal is to become like Tao - peaceful and harmonious and consequently a blessed life after death. This ideal is spelled out as a quiet, restful, simplicity like heaven itself. Tao is calm and peaceful and therefore ethical life consists in becoming calm and peaceful. There are at least eight Chinese synonyms which are used to describe the abiding admirable quietude of the eternal Tao and of the perfect individual. The humble man is a good man. Often he is well appreciated because of his lowliness and his intrinsic goodness. In this sense every one must be inspired with the friendly desire to love and do good to one another. When one is sincere in one’s purpose, the others will be happy. One who is in harmony with Tao becomes friendly to everything.

2. We do not hear something outstanding about the life after death in Taoism. Some scholars are of the opinion that its doctrines concerning immortality are inadequate. The Chinese people always believed that immortality means physical immortality. The physical immortality means a change into a body which is made of more durable or lighter material than the one we have in normal life. According to this belief, human after death leaves one’s old body as a snake sheds off its old skin and soars off to the spheres of happiness. This physical longevity was achieved both by religious practices such as the observation of commandments, moral conduct, prayer and incantations and physical practices such as diets, medicines, chemicals, breathing

methods and gymnastics. Since immortality was taught in terms of physical immortality, so also paradise or heaven was conceived in terms of this world. They are known as “Blessed Islands”. Three such islands are mentioned: Peng-lai, Ying-chou and Fu-sang. Every one was immortal in these islands. The birds and animals were pure white. The palaces and gates are of pure gold and silver. Kun-lun Mountain is also considered as the abode of the immortals.



UNIT 3

SHINTOISM

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Origin
- 3.3 Name
- 3.4 Founder
- 3.5 Sacred Scriptures
- 3.6 Kami
- 3.7 Creation myth
- 3.8 *Amaterasu*
- 3.9 Shinto Worship
- 3.10 Cult and Festivals
- 3.11 Ethical Teachings
- 3.12 Sects
- 3.13 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.14 Key Words
- 3.15 Further Readings and References
- 3.16 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we explain about the Shintoism. After a brief explanation on its origin and the historical developments, we see the sacred scriptures of this religion. We will deal with the main aspects of this religion in its teachings on Kami, creation myth and other forms of worship. We also will deal with their cult and feasts in brief.

By the end of this unit you will be able to know:

- the overall picture of Shintoism
- its historical origin and development
- the Sacred Scriptures of Shintoism and its important teachings
- the doctrines on Kami and the importance of the worship of *Amaterasu*, the worship of sun God
- the importance of cult of purification in shintoism and the importance of shrines etc..

3.1 INTRODUCTION

There were three religions in Japan namely Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Among these Buddhism had a greater influence. These religions came via China. There is a special reason for this invasion. It indicates the very nature of Japanese people. To understand the true nature of Shintoism it is important to note how the three racial strains have contributed to the formation of the Japanese people. The original indigenous people are *Ainu*. Therefore, Shintoism is primarily an indigenous religion. The other two races are from Asiatic main land. These racial strands have

left their mark on the culture, language and mythology. These foreign elements have also contributed a lasting form of dualism to Shinto religion. This dualism appears throughout the history of Shintoism. The dualism is between the formal, official and national cult and the illuminating body of popular folk practices and the ordinary every day faith. This dualism we see in every aspect of Shinto beliefs, rituals and moral practices.

3.2 ORIGIN

The exact origin of Shintoism is unknown. According to the traditional chronology of Japan the origin of Shintoism goes back to 660 B.C. This is the date of the first Japanese Emperor (*Mikado*) Jimmu Tenno. Shintoism is the third oldest religion. It is also very unique among the world religions because of its contribution to the political theory and national stability. The special characteristic of Shintoism is that it held absolute supremacy over Japan. This undisputed sway of Shintoism over Japan lasted till 552 A.D. when Buddhism came to Japan.

3.3 NAME

The name “Shinto” is the common designation which is derived from a Chinese word “*shin-tao*”. The word “shin” means “Kami” (God) and “Tao” is the distinctive element of Taoism which means “The Divine Way”. It was so named in the 8th century A.D. when Buddhism was accepted as one of the official religions of Japan. According to its own record *Nihoni-gi*, 2:195 (References: Confer *Transactions and Proceedings of the Japan Society*), one of the emperors of Japan “despised the Way of the Gods” and formally adopted the Buddhist religion. The actual Japanese name for Shinto is *Kami-no Michi*. The literal meaning is “The Way of the Gods” or “The Way of the *Kami*”. The name was used to distinguish it from the name *Batsudo* - “The way of the Buddha”. At first Shintoism began as purely prehistoric agricultural ceremonies. At that time it was not endowed with a supporting body of doctrines, morals or otherwise. It was in the form of folklore handed down from generation to generation. The earliest known priests were called *Shamans (Miko)* who performed the ceremonies on the behalf of people. Eventually a particular tribe called *Yamato* officiated the ceremonies on behalf of other tribes. Their chieftain assumed the duties that led to the leadership of the Shinto state. Shinto became clearly political by 8th century when *Yamato* writers ascribed divine origins to the imperial family and thus they claimed legitimacy for the rule what is known as “*Kokutai Shinto*”. According to its Sacred Scriptures, the islands of Japan were the first divine creation and the first *Mikado* (emperor), Jimmu Tenno was a direct descendant from the Sun-goddess *Amaterasu*. This belief in the divine origin of the land and government was steadfastly fostered till 1946 A.D., when the emperor Hirohito abandoned the imperial line of *Amaterasu*. This was a rude shock, and the belief that Japan is a land of *Kami* was shattered.

3.4 FOUNDER

Unlike other well known world religions which have a definite founder or a prophet or a charismatic leader who personally initiated a particular religion with a definite set of doctrines, Shinto does not have a definite founder. It was not personally founded and therefore does not possess the sharply defined characteristics of other world religions. With regard to the founder what we can say is that Shinto can be traced back to some definite *Yamato* writers who handed

down some definite set of doctrines and beliefs. Most of the time, the divine emperor was the official head.

3.5 SACRED SCRIPTURES

There are two primary sets of literature which are known as the Sacred Scriptures of the Shintoism. They are the most venerable, valuable and influential documents in the indigenous literature of Japan. They set forth the story of the deeds and conversations in “The Age of the Gods” before there were any men. They begin with the story of the creation of the Islands of Sunrise. They also narrate in a fascinating way how the imperial line was directly handed down from heaven by the gods to the islands of Japan.

Ko-ji-ki - Records of Ancient Matters and *Nihon-gi (Nihon Shoki) - Chronicles of Japan*

Ko-ji-ki was compiled in 712 and *Nihon-gi* was written in 720 A.D. Before this period for a thousand years the Shinto had only the oral tradition. Hence many eminent scholars doubt with regard to the actual authenticity of these two Sacred Books. However, we know what is more or less as authentic is only from the preface of the *Ko-ji-ki* and the commentary on the *Nihongi*. The above dates of compilation bring the Sacred Scriptures of Shinto very late in the history of the world religions, more than a century after the birth of the Prophet Mohammed, who founded the latest of the world’s great religions, and more than 1300 years after the earliest event in human history which is recorded in the documents themselves, the accession of the first *Mikado Jimmu Tenno* in 660 B.C. In spite of this late compilation of the Sacred Scriptures, *the Ko-ji-ki* and the *Nihon-gi* are the earliest written documents in 1200 years.

The author of the *Ko-ji-ki* presents himself in the preface as a court noble of the fifth rank. He was specifically appointed and commanded by the divine emperor himself to collect and arrange the genealogies of the emperors and likewise the words of former ages. These were specifically repeated word by word to the compiler by a very remarkable “reciter” who was able to repeat the contents of anything he had ever read and who could remember all that he had ever heard.

The commentary on the *Nihon-gi* also mentions about the above author who was asked to collaborate with a prince under the same royal authority only eight years later to produce the second document, which is a more extensive collection of various source materials. They are also arranged with the same royalist purpose. The absolute reliability of these two historical documents was first rejected, on critical grounds, in 1893 by a Japanese scholar, Professor Kume of the Imperial University at Tokyo.

Besides these two, there are two more important Scriptural documents. The first one is *Yengi-shiki - Institutes of the period of Yengi*. This was compiled around 901 to 923 A.D. It contains 50 books. The first ten books are probably the earliest known records. The actual texts record twenty five *Nori-to*, prayers for various ceremonial occasions. The second Scriptural document is *Manyo-shiu* - a “Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves”. This is an anthology of 4,496 poems. Perhaps it was written between 5th to 8th centuries A.D. The Shinto Scriptures are made up of various collections of legends, prayers, chronicles and poems. They focus on the divine origin and the early history of the island empire. They specifically glorify the joyous delight in the

powers of nature. They also record and recognize some of the gruesome aspects of the powers of nature. However, they do not contain any of the most common and general tragic and glorious themes of religious literature. There is a total absence of a conflict of duties, the intricate problems of the moral ideal, the critical struggles of human beings with good and evil, a pre-eminent historic founder, a saving or redemptive assistance coming to the individual in an effort for acquiring virtue, a progressive accomplishment of a definite plan for the whole world and the fascinating and attractive mysteries for a future life.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What are the primary Scriptures of Shintoism?

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3.6 KAMI

Shinto is fundamentally a religion of nature worship. This form of worship is crystal clear in the Shinto cult, festivals and rituals. As a result Shinto displays a powerful belief in the spirits of nature. These are designated with a most common and popular word in Japanese language as *Kami*. The literal meaning of *Kami* is “upper”. This term is interpreted in various ways. It means pure or bright, superior, mysterious, hidden and supernatural. The usual common meaning is “superior beings”. They are both gods and goddesses. They are also both personal and impersonal. Some are benevolent, some are evil, some are feared and some are revered. There are as many as sixteen different theories with regard to the origin and significance of the word *Kami* in the latest elaborate treatise on Shinto published in Japan. They are classified under three main ideas: Pure and bright, Superior, and Strange: Mysterious, Fearful, Hidden and Supernatural. There is no other word in the original Japanese with such a rich and multiform content. The most famous theologian in the whole history of Shinto is Motoori (1730 – 1801 A.D.) who has diligently tried to bring out the true meaning of this crucial term *Kami*.

Due to this, Shinto was originally a nature-worship. The majority of *Kami* are either natural objects or forces in nature. The peculiarity of these *Kami* is that they are born, they marry, they beget children, they become sick, they bathe, they kill, they destroy, they are jealous, they weep, they curse, they die and they are buried and subsequently they may be raised in rank by the emperor of Japan. Therefore, these *Kami* more or less act and behave just like humans.

3.7 CREATION MYTH

The creation myth is one of the most interesting features of Shinto. Both *Ko-ji-ki* and *Nohon-gi* describe the creation myth. Probably it is derived from Chinese mythology. At the beginning there was only an ocean of chaos. Then the sky and earth were separated. Out of the mire in the form of a reed grew *Kunitokotachi* – “the eternal land ruler” or “mid-sky master”. Together with him two subordinate deities arose. They symbolize the male and female principles like the interacting *Yin-Yang* forces of Chinese mythology.

Izanagi - the male who invites

Izanami – the female who invites

Together they created the terrestrial world, the eight islands as well as the divine rulers, the sun Goddess: *Amaterasu*, the moon God: *Tsuki-yomi* and the storm God: *Susanowo*. But when *Izanami* gave birth to fire she died and went to the land of gloom *Yomotsu-kuni*. Since the work of creation was incomplete *Izanagi* went after her in the hope of bringing her back. *Izanami* met him at the entrance and requested him to wait while she arranged for her release with the deities of death. She warned him not to look at her closely because she was full of decay. When she had been gone for a long time, he broke off one of the end teeth of the comb that was stuck in his hair, and lighting it as a torch, he entered *Yomotsu-kuni* and looked. What he saw was shattering: maggots swarmed everywhere and *Izanami* was rotting.

Overwhelmed at the vision of dissolution, *Izanagi* fled. *Izanami* sent after her brother spouse eight thunder gods with an army of ghastly warriors. But *Izanagi* reached the frontier pass and finally, *Izanami* came in person to find that *Izanagi* had shut the pass. So the divine couple exchanged leave-takings. She threatened to kill a 1000 people in his kingdom every day, while he retorted that he would cause every day 1500 women to give birth.

3.8 AMATERASU

The Sun-goddess, *Ama-terasu* (the Heaven-Shining-One) takes the primary place in Shinto worship. Her myths are the most important in the indigenous faith of Shinto because it is the way of the gods. This folk tradition is fundamentally not so much a religion as a set of ancient beliefs and observances which have remained comparatively unchanged over the past millennium, despite the importation of Confucianism and Buddhism. *Amaterasu* is the East Asian sister of *Inanna*, the Sumerian goddess of fertility and love. The belief in her as the foremost deity was associated with the tradition that the ruling family is descended from the Sun-goddess. She is the highest manifestation of *Kunitokotachi*, the unseen, transcendent and yet immanent Spirit of the universe. This idea of the sun as a goddess, instead of as a god, is rare and it may be a survival from the most archaic stage of mythology. *Amaterasu* is the most beautiful goddess, benign, compassionate and meek. She is the most favourite deity of Japan because she is represented as one who delights to pour down on her favourite islands the life giving rays of the sun.

The Japanese people believe that they are the descendents of *Kami* while the divine emperors - *Mikados* are the direct descendents of *Amaterasu*. She sent one of her offspring *Ni-ni-gi* down to earth to rule the land of Japan.

3.9 SHINTO WORSHIP

There are numerous shrines and priests all over Japan. But the fact is that the number of deities is too large and indefinite to permit a systematic worship of all. The scriptures report only the actual worship of only a few deities.

The Sun-goddess *Amaterasu* is the most obvious and eminent object of worship. There are two kinds of worships of the Sun-goddess. On one hand she is easily worshipped, individually and locally. On other hand this great Shinto deity is also officially and formally worshipped. *Amaterasu* is worshipped in the famous temple or shrine at Ise situated on the seacoast southeast of the ancient capital, Kyoto. It is a centralized shrine for the whole Japanese nation, somewhat similar to the Jerusalem temple of the Jews. This is the most symbolic and sacred place in all Japan. It is most frequently visited on religious pilgrimages. *Amaterasu* represents the symbol of purity. She is represented by the mirror, which stands for honesty and sincerity. There is an "inner temple" called *Naiku* which is believed by the Japanese to date back to the year 4 B.C. In this inner sanctuary the round mirror is preserved which was given by *Amaterasu* to the first *Mikado* as a sacred token. It is very precious to *Amaterasu* and it symbolizes the great orb of light in heaven.

Both the worship in the sacred temple and the method of worship are recorded in both the Scriptures. This goes back even to a time before the Christian era. The princess of the royal house has been the high priestess of the Sun-goddess at Ise and this custom has been maintained throughout a period longer than the entire history of Christianity (*Ko-ji-ki*. 174, 186). Almost all Japanese people consider it a privilege and a duty, at least once in a life time to make a religious pilgrimage to Ise. The outer temple of Ise is known as "*Gaku*" which is dedicated to *Uke-mochi* - the Food-goddess.

The second form of worship is known as *Mikado* Worship. This is also a national worship. The *Mikado* is believed to be divine and a direct descendent of *Amaterasu*. It is from her and not from any male deity the ancestry of the emperor is received because *Amaterasu* was appointed to rule by the primeval progenitor, *Izanagi*. The *Mikado* himself asserts this claim of divine origin and authority in several royal edicts.

But the fact is that the actual sovereignty of the *Mikado* was built up only gradually and by a process of fighting over un-submissive people. The Sun-goddess in her original instructions pointed out the need of physical force over the inhabitants. There is also a record which says about the emperor *Mimaki* who was short lived because of his lack of thoroughness. Indeed, condemnation of more than one *Mikado* stands written in the sacred writings. Thus we see that the Emperor worship was such that no one was allowed to look down upon the Imperial Majesty. This practice was in force from the beginning till the end of World War II. The sacred character of the Emperor was assiduously taught and carried out. He was a man set apart from all others and he was accessible only to a relatively small group of officials. Every year prior to 1946, there were certain solemn ceremonies on *Mikado's* birthday in every educational institution. The obeisance to the picture of the Emperor was a must. Thus the authority and command of the Emperor was undisputed. His political and religious authority was unquestionable. Even the armed forces had a fanatical loyalty to the extent of laying down life at the command of the Emperor. The national flag of Japan consists of the radiant red sun. This is a concrete instance of how the religious faith of Shinto has been directed powerfully to promote patriotic zeal. The full

significance of this emblem gave to the people of “The Land of the Rising Sun” the glowing suggestion that for their national and religious rule they should reverently look up on high to the source of all light. The subjects of the divinely descended heavenly *Mikado* can regard for themselves a divine progeny dwelling in the holy land through him.

Check Your Progress 11

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Explain the concept of *Kami*

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2) Explain the important elements of Shinto worship

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3.10 CULT AND FESTIVALS

Cult

Purification

One of the essential conditions for cult is personal purification. The Shinto prescribes the obligation to wash assiduously with water. Both the Sacred Scriptures refer to the purification even in the case of gods like *Izanagi* who washed himself for the purpose of personal cleanliness. The most important ceremony is “*Oho harahi*” – the great purification. This includes expiatory offerings and the recitation of a *Nori-to*. The Emperor absolves people’s sins and impurities. The offerings made are thrown into a river as a scapegoat. The offences are the mischievous interferences with agriculture. Shinto teaches emphatically the obligation of purity and sense of communal guilt which needs continual purification. But this is mostly physical and ceremonial rather than a purity of heart and thought.

Shrines and Offerings

The sacrifices are offered by the royal princess with 73 mandarins. In Shinto tradition, the priests are women - *Shamans*. There are numerous shrines, *ginjas* in every hamlet, along the wayside

and in almost every picturesque spot like lofty trees, hillside waterfalls or watercourses throughout Japan. In the 10th century there were 3,132 officially recognized shrines. In 1880 the village and ungraded shrines numbered 183047. In 1920 the number was 111181 and there were 110,000 shrines under the government during the Second World War. The number does not include the sectarian shrines which were not supported by the government. The estimate is that the number of shrines during pre-war time was 7 to 10 million.

The Shinto shrines even in their settings are designed to promote a religious appreciation of beauty in nature. There is a characteristic *tori-i* - gateway, the ends of this upper crosspiece curving heavenward. The worship in these shrines is almost exclusively individual and not congregational. It consists of obeisance and bowing reverently. Kneeling was not so common but clapping of hands even silently is an act of reverence. The offering of the material things is one of the most common forms of worship. The daily offerings made to the Sun and Food goddesses at *Ise* consist of *sa-ke* (liquor), rice, salt, fish, birds, fruits, seaweeds and vegetables. The annual offerings at the tomb of the first Mikado are the products of mountain, river and sea, including fish, cakes, birds and liquor.

The worship is completed in the shrines by offering a prayer. The earliest records contain numerous conversations with the deities but there are no words of prayer addressed to them. There are only two passing references to prayer. These consist chiefly of announcements to the various deities, ascriptions of praise, and lists of material offerings. In the first *Nori-to* the phrase "fulfil the praises" occurs nineteen times. In this entire collection, no moral or spiritual blessings are sought. Prayers are mostly for material blessings. They contain petitions for rain, harvests, preservation from earthquakes and conflagrations, health and long life to the sovereign, peace, prosperity, the safety of ambassadors and the suppression of rebellion.

Feasts

Popular festivals are important parts of Shinto. Most of the ritual prayers in *Nori-to* are connected with specific ceremonies and feasts. These feasts are basically agricultural. *Toshigohi-no-matsuri*: It is a harvest prayer service during the sowing of rice seeds in the second month of the year. *Hirose-Oho-imi-no-matsuri*: A prescribed ceremonial service of the food-goddess as rice-plants grow up in the fourth day of the fourth moon of each year. On this day numerous offerings are made and the emperor promises still further. *Nihi-name*: This is the harvest festival of first fruits. It consists primarily in tasting the new rice in the eleventh month. It is an elaborate ancient ceremony, accompanied by songs, dances, feasting, holiday dress and presents. Until the ceremony is over no strict Shinto devotee will eat the new rice. *Oho-nihe*: The Great Tasting. The Emperor in person conducts the festival of first fruits in his Coronation year. This is the most solemn festival which is described in *Nihon-gi*.

There are other harvest festivals like Joint-tasting, Divine Tasting and New moon ceremonies with prayers and offerings. The monthly festivals are known as *Tsuki-nami no matsuri* with three prescribed *Norito* prayers.

3.11 ETHICAL TEACHINGS

One of the most outstanding features of Shinto is the absence of a definite set of theological beliefs and a code of morality. There are a few passages in *Nihon-gi* referring to the sage advice for government officials. Hence there are no specific ethical teachings or moral code for the people at large. The only command is to obey the Emperor. He is the son of the Goddess. His mind is in perfect harmony of thought and feeling with her. He is inspired by her in case of any doubt. There is only one way, the way of the gods. If one obeys this there is no need of any other command. By nature people were truly moral in their practice and they required no special moral code. Hence we find no *Michi* or Ethics. Some of the important offences are mentioned in *Norito* 10 which are purified by the emperor on the day of Great Purification. They are transgressions against the rice- fields and they are celestial offenses. The earthly offenses are cutting of living or dead bodies, killing of birds and animals. Leprosy and incest cause impurity. “Flaying alive and flaying backwards, breaking down the divisions of rice-fields, filling up ditches, marriages between superiors and inferiors, marriages with horses, marriages with cattle, marriages with fowls and marriages with dogs” (*Ko-ji-ki*. 230). However a code of ethics (*Bushido*) was developed in the 11th and 12th A.D. This was due to the influence of Confucianism and Buddhism which fostered loyalty, courage, self-sacrifice, benevolence, honour and self-control. But this code was not written down.

3.12 SECTS

The sects arose due to the influence of Buddhism:

- (1) Buddhism strongly influenced the sect called ‘*Honji-Suijaku*’

Honji - Buddhism is real and basic religion.

Suijaku - Shinto is a partial and local manifestation.

Therefore *Kami* are equated to *Bodhisattvas*.

- (2) *Ryobu Shinto* - dual Shinto: Buddhism and Shinto as two aspects of the same reality.
- (3) *Yuiitsu Shinto* - one and only Shinto.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

- 1) Explain the role of shrines in Shintoism?

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- 2) Discuss the importance of Ethics in Shintoism?

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3.13 LET US SUM UP

Shinto is primarily a religion of nature worship. It displays a powerful sense of devotion to the beauty of nature. Shinto advocates twofold worship: the Sun-goddess and the Emperor. Everything else is regarded as *Kami*. There are numerous shrines all over Japan. The form of worship is simple. The offerings are for material benefits. Its emphasis on cleanliness and purity is awe-inspiring. The Sacred Scriptures are filled with myths but give no guidance and inspiration for a noble living. There is no glorious hope of a future life.

3.14 KEY WORDS

Cult: Cult refers to a cohesive social group and their devotional beliefs or practices, which the surrounding population considers to be outside of mainstream cultures.

Genealogy: Genealogy (from Greek: *genea*, “descent”; and *logos*, “knowledge”) is the study of families and the tracing of their lineages and history.

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3.16 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your progress I

1. There are two primary sets of literature which are known as the Sacred Scriptures of the Shintoism. They are the most venerable, valuable and influential documents in the indigenous literature of Japan. They are : *Ko-ji-ki - Records of Ancient Matters* and *Nihon-gi (Nihon Shoki) - Chronicles of Japan*. *Ko-ji-ki* was compiled in 712 and *Nihon-gi* was written in 720 A.D. Before this period for a thousand years the Shinto had only the oral tradition. Hence many eminent scholars doubt with regard to the actual authenticity of these two Sacred Books. However, we know what is more or less as authentic is only from the preface of the *Ko-ji-ki* and the commentary on the *Nihongi*.

The author of the *Ko-ji-ki* presents himself in the preface as a court noble of the fifth rank. He was specifically appointed and commanded by the divine emperor himself to collect and arrange the genealogies of the emperors and likewise the words of former ages. These were specifically repeated word by word to the compiler by a very remarkable “reciter” who was able to repeat the contents of anything he had ever read and who could remember all that he had ever heard.

The commentary on the *Nihon-gi* also mentions about the above author who was asked to collaborate with a prince under the same royal authority only eight years later to produce the second document, which is a more extensive collection of various source materials. They are also arranged with the same royalist purpose.

Check your Progress II

1. Shinto is fundamentally a religion of nature worship. This form of worship is crystal clear in the Shinto cult, festivals and rituals. As a result Shinto displays a powerful belief in the spirits of nature. These are designated with a most common and popular word in Japanese language as *Kami*. The literal meaning of *Kami* is “upper”. This term is interpreted in various ways. It means pure or bright, superior, mysterious, hidden and supernatural. The usual common meaning is “superior beings”. They are both gods and goddesses. They are also both personal and impersonal. Some are benevolent, some are evil, some are feared and some are revered. There is no other word in the original Japanese with such a rich and multiform content. The most famous theologian in the whole history of Shinto is Motoori (1730 – 1801 A.D.). He has diligently tried to bring out the true meaning of this crucial term *Kami*. The majority of *Kami* are either natural objects or forces in nature. The peculiarity of these *Kami* is that they are born, they marry, they beget children, they become sick, they bathe, they kill, they destroy, they are jealous, they weep, they curse, they die and they are buried and subsequently they may be raised in rank by the emperor of Japan. Therefore these *Kami* are more or less act and behave just like humans.

2. There are numerous shrines and deities all over Japan. But the two main objects of worship are the Sun- goddess *Amaterasu*, and the emperor who is known as *Mikado*. The Sun- goddess *Amaterasu* is the most obvious and eminent object of worship. There are two kinds of worships of the Sun-goddess. On one hand she is easily worshipped, individually and locally. On other hand this great Shinto deity is also officially and formally worshipped. *Amaterasu* is worshipped in the famous temple or shrine at Ise situated on the seacoast southeast of the ancient capital, Kyoto. It is a centralized shrine for the whole Japanese nation, somewhat similar to the Jerusalem temple of the Jews. This is the most symbolic and sacred place in all Japan. It is most frequently visited on religious pilgrimages. *Amaterasu* represents the symbol of purity. She is represented by the mirror, which stands for honesty and sincerity.

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Thus we see that the Emperor worship was such that no one was allowed to look down upon the Imperial Majesty. This practice was in force from the beginning till the end of World War II.

Check your progress III

The sacrifices are offered by the royal princess with 73 mandarins. In Shinto tradition, the priests are women - *Shamans*. There are numerous shrines, *ginjas* in every hamlet, along the wayside and in almost every picturesque spot like lofty trees, hillside waterfalls or watercourses throughout Japan. The Shinto shrines even in their settings are designed to promote a religious appreciation of beauty in nature. There is a characteristic *tori-i* - gateway, the ends of this upper crosspiece curving heavenward. The worship in these shrines is almost exclusively individual and not congregational. It consists of obeisance and bowing reverently. Kneeling was not so common but clapping of hands even silently is an act of reverence.

2. One of the most outstanding features of Shinto is the absence of a definite set of theological beliefs and a code of morality. There are a few passages in *Nihon-gi* referring to the sage advice for government officials.

Hence there are no specific ethical teachings or moral code for the people at large. The only command is to obey the Emperor. He is the son of the Goddess. His mind is in perfect harmony of thought and feeling with her. He is inspired by her in case of any doubt. There is only one way, the way of the gods. If one obeys this there is no need of any other command. By nature people were truly moral in their practice and they required no special moral code. Hence we find no *Michi* or Ethics.

UNIT 4

TRIBAL RELIGIONS

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Tribal Religions
- 4.3 Tribal Religions in India
- 4.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.5 Key Words
- 4.6 Further Readings and References
- 4.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we explain the basic elements of the tribal religions. It has two parts. The first part explains the general characteristics of the tribal religions. It also analyses the need for the belief systems which are important elements of any society. It analyses the characteristics common to most of the tribal religions like God, Ghost and the belief in Spirit and the people's relation to that spirit. The second part explains some of the important elements of the tribal religions in India. It elaborates the world view of the tribal religions and the inter mingling of religion and society in the tribal world. At the end of the course on tribal religions you are guided to understand:

- the basic characteristics of tribal religions
- the role of religion in the daily life
- some of the important concepts in tribal religions such as God, ghosts and spirit, and human's relationship with them
- the customs and practices of the tribals of India

4.1 INTRODUCTION

If anyone were to ask, what interest the religions of the simpler peoples can have for us, it would be good to remember that some of the most important political, social and moral philosophers from Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau to Herbert Spencer, Durkheim and Bergson have considered the facts of life of those peoples living in small-scale societies with a simple material culture and lacking literature to have great significance for the understanding of social life in general. For our purpose, these peoples are called tribal peoples here. Further, the men who have been most responsible for changing the whole climate of thought in our civilization during the nineteenth century, the great myth-makers: Darwin, Marx-Engels, Freud, Frazer and Comte; all have shown great interest in the life of the tribal people and have used what was known about them in their works.

Secondly, all who have interest in religion must acknowledge that a study of the religious ideas and practices of tribal peoples, which are of great variety, may help us to reach certain conclusions about the nature of religion in general, and therefore also about the so-called higher religions or historical religions or the religions of

revelation. Nothing could have been revealed about anything if men had not already had an idea about that thing. The world around has everywhere revealed to men and women something of the divine and of their own nature and destiny.

4.2 TRIBAL RELIGIONS

Totemism

The term *totem* comes from a North-American Indian language, but it has been widely used to refer to animal or plant species and occasionally other things which are held in special regard by particular groups in a society. A totemic society is divided into a number of named groups, the members of which believe themselves to be descended unilineally from a common ancestor, and stand in a special relationship, usually involving respect and avoidance to some object.

The term totemism covers a multitude of phenomena. However, it refers to situations where each one of the number of distinct social groups into which a society is divided maintains a particular regard for a particular object in the natural or cultural environment. This object is not regarded as valuable in its own right, but because it stands as a symbol for something else. This is why totemism is sometimes considered to be a magico-religious institution. Usually, the totem symbolizes the unity and solidarity of the group which has it. Institutions which have been labeled totemism are so various that no single hypothesis is likely to be adequate to explain all of them. As with all symbols, we have to ask what it is that is symbolized and what the social consequences of symbolizing it are. There is no reason why all cultures should give identical answers to these questions.

Gods, Ghosts, Ancestors and Spirits

Gods, ghosts and spirits are thought of as different from the other impersonal magical forces, however difficult it may be to draw a sharp line between them. The important thing about all of them is that they are conceived to be non-human, even though they may have some human attributes. The fact that they are endowed with some human attributes means that living people may enter into some sort of social relationship with them. Again precise borderlines cannot be drawn. Among many tribal cultures nothing is quite inert. There is a force or power in everything which can be known and 'personalisation' is very much a matter of more or less. However, nearly always there is a distinction between those powers with which a relationship of a more or less personal kind can be entered into, and those with which it cannot. It is upon this difference that we base a rough distinction between magic, concerned with impersonal magical forces, and religion, concerned with ghosts, gods and spirits.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is totemism

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Supreme Spiritual Being

In many societies, there has developed the idea of a supreme spiritual being, a high god or the 'sky spirit'. It is thought of as a kind of universal and all pervasive spirit. Besides this spirit, there are other lesser spirits which have importance in certain places. Where the high god expresses the generalized idea of spirit or 'power', the concept sometimes tends to become depersonalized. So in some cultures the high god is thought to be less interested in the affairs of men than are the lesser gods or spirits who may be thought to play a frequent part in everyday life. Often the idea of an otiose high god is expressed in mythical accounts of how after creating the universe he withdrew from it, being dissatisfied with his handiwork. Sometimes, human beings are represented as having broken their original relationship with divinity through pride or disobedience.

Spirit Possession

We have *spirit possession* when a person assumes a state of apparent auto-hypnosis or dissociation, and his behaviour, which is not that of his ordinary self, is understood to be due to the control by some spiritual agent normally outside him. Possession by a spirit of some kind is often given as an explanation of illness or abnormality, especially in the case of states of mental derangement or dissociation, when the subject does seem to be 'out of his mind'. The social history of Western Europe provides numerous examples of possession by evil spirits, especially in connection with witchcraft. Since possession is usually a bad thing the question then arises: what is to be done about it? Different cultures give different answers. Sometimes a spiritual force conceived to be more powerful than the presumed spirit may compel it to leave its victim. Other times techniques of 'peaceful persuasion' may be used. A shaman may with soft words, cajole a minor spirit which is troubling a client to leave him and to enter an earthenware pot. The pot is then quickly sealed with clay, and is later destroyed or abandoned in the bush. In other cases, where the subject is not merely possessed but is also a medium, he may, as it were, come to terms with the spirit through the performance of appropriate ritual. Whether the spirit is the ghost of a deceased relative or some other kind of power, it may use its medium, while in a state of induced possession, to say what it requires if it is to leave its victim alone.

Spirit Mediumship

Where the presumed spirit not only possesses someone but also communicated with other people through the possessed person, usually in a voice, accent and perhaps language not used by that person in ordinary life, but culturally accepted as appropriate to the spirit believed to be mediated, then we may speak of *spirit*

mediumship. The ways in which spirits are believed to express themselves vary from one culture to another. Although mediums are often in a condition of dissociation, in most cultures the proper way for spirits to manifest themselves through mediums can be learnt, either through formal instruction by experts, or by experience and example. In all cultures with institutionalized spirit mediumship-cults, certain personality types seem to take more readily than others to cult participation, such as, a propensity to fits or other kinds of mental disturbance.

Shamanism

When the medium is not only a vehicle for spirits, but is believed to have power to control and direct spirits and is able to command them by special ritual techniques, we have *shamanism*. The word comes from the language of one of the North Asian people. It is almost as widespread as spirit mediumship. Often it is believed that shamanistic powers are used by sorcerers, who having once entered into a possession relationship with some harmful spirit – for example the smallpox spirit – can retain it as a kind of familiar spirit and send it to afflict an enemy. Where spirit mediumship is highly institutionalized, novices in the cult usually have to undergo a complex process of initiation. The ritual is controlled by experts, themselves often medium for a number of spirits. These experts know all the techniques appropriate for the ritual and can teach these techniques to others.

Shrines

It is often believed that some kinds of spirits are too powerful, and with them, as with God or the gods in non-mediumistic religions, some sort of more or less enduring relationship may have to be entered into. Prayers and invocations may be addressed to spirits, and sacrifices made to them. As a rule, spirits are conceived as immaterial and, usually, as being diffused through space, or perhaps as not in space at all. However, they are generally associated with specific places in the material world. If these places are made by men, usually at the behest of a god or spirit, they are called shrines. Believers are concerned with the unseen spiritual world and it is helpful to them to have a place where they can pray and sacrifice. It stands as a sign and reminder of the spiritual power which both acknowledge.

Relationship between Humans and Spirits

Having entered into the above mentioned kind of relationship, what does the human party to it do? First, he usually speaks to it, rather as though it were a person. This is the point of having spirits. If the spirit, or God, is thought to be vastly greater and more powerful than men, as is the case in most of the advanced religions, then the address takes the form of humble entreaty. Man does not generally attempt to impose terms on God, still less does he threaten or abuse Him. He approaches Him submissively. However, in many of the simpler or tribal religions the relationship between men and spirits is less one-sided. Very often ghosts and spirits are thought of as being dependent on men, as men are on them. There are rights and obligations on

both sides. In such cases the relationship, like so many social relationships, is thought of as involving reciprocity or exchange. Just as a man needs the good-will and protection of the spirits if he is to prosper, so a spirit is thought to need the attention of men if it is to be remembered, and to be given the opportunity to manifest itself in the human world. Here the underlying principle is, 'I give to you so that you may give to me'; and much of the relationship between men and spirits are of this kind.

Sacrifice

Since there is usually an element of exchange in the relationship between men and spirits, it often involves the symbolic presenting or making over to them of some material or sometimes non-material thing. Hence, the almost world-wide institution of sacrifice is prevalent. Sometimes this involves the destruction of what is offered, frequently the immolation of some living creature. Sometimes, however, food or drink is left for the spirit at the shrine. Sometimes living animals are dedicated to a ghost or spirit, and not actually killed. Always there is the idea of some deprivation on the part of the sacrificer, and always something is made over, transmitted from man to god or spirit.

Scapegoat

When the expiatory element is dominant, and the emphasis is rather on getting rid of evil and impurity than on making a gift to a specific spiritual power, there is no sacrifice but a rather different kind of institution, of which the most familiar example is the *scapegoat*. Where evil is conceived as a kind of real existent, it may be ritually transferred to a chosen animal which may be then either driven out of the community or destroyed.

Blessing and Cursing

There is one further sphere of human behaviour which involves reference to spiritual beings or forces, that of blessing, cursing and oath-taking. In the first two, a human agent gives verbal expression to his wish that something may happen to another person or persons. This may often happen through the instrumentality of some non-human power, which may or may not be specified. Thus, the blessing or cursing which is generally believed to be most effective is that of a person to whose wishes the powers invoked are most likely to attend. That is why elders' curse is particularly feared because they are the closest of the living to the ancestral ghosts. Where there are religious specialists, such as shamans or priests, their blessing or curse is often thought to be the most potent of all.

Check Your Progress II

- Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Sacrifice is a symbolic Act. How?

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2. What is the importance of religious behaviors and the rituals in the modern day society?

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4.3 TRIBAL RELIGIONS IN INDIA

Worldview

‘Worldview’ is the structure of things as human beings perceive them. It refers to the way the world looks to that people ‘looking out’. It denotes the way a given people in a particular society, see themselves in relation to all else. Concepts of culture and worldview are related but carry subtle differences. On the one hand, if we try to describe the important qualities of people we can say something about those aspects, which include the mode of life, principal customs, practices, beliefs and institutions of that group. Such description amounts to the ‘culture’ of a people. On the other hand, the ‘worldview’ of a people ‘is the way a people characteristically look outward upon the universe’. It suggests how everything looks to a people. It includes, (a) the conceptions of what ought to be as well as of what is, (b) patterns of thought, (c) most comprehensive attitudes towards life, (d) dimensions of time, ideas of past and future.

Within the framework of worldview, there are two types of ‘views’ to be distinguished: (i) ‘inside’ view, and (ii) ‘outside’ view. If we are to understand the worldview of a people, we need to begin with the ‘inside’ view. We need to see the meaning and feel the feeling connected with the object or act in the mind of the native. Only after this we can shift to an ‘outside’ view point. The ‘outside’ view consists in detached and abstract understanding of a view point. Thus, delineating the worldview of a given culture entails objectifying and describing the interpretation of the ‘world’ of that particular culture – as people in that culture see it. Initially this term came into English as a rendering of the German *Weltanschauung* which is an overall perspective on life encompassing the way a person perceives the world, evaluates and responds to it.

The notion of worldview encompasses human experiences, such as, time, society, causality, nature, world, sacred and the self. It denotes “a distinct set of attitudes, beliefs and values that are held to characterize particular individuals or social group.

The term often implies a relationship between the social location or situation of such individuals and group and their consequent outlook or view of reality” (O’Sullivan et al. 1996: 333). It deals with the aggregate of ideas which an individual within a group or that group have, of the universe in and around them. It attempts to define those ideas from the point of view of the individuals holding them, from inside the culture rather than outside.

In the Indian context, tribal peoples are called *Adivasis*, meaning original inhabitants. Adivasi worldview involves, first of all an understanding and describing the Adivasi world as the Adivasi traditions look upon it, and then, conceptualizing and abstracting it. Indeed, the inside view of the Adivasi world involves, (a) collective interpretation that is reflected in Adivasi language, cosmology, rituals, customs, beliefs, myths, songs and stories; (b) the way the Adivasi traditions interpret time-space dimensions, (c) the way the Adivasis see their own identity and that of others, and (d) the way they interpret ethical dimensions.

In the Adivasi worldview space is central. Everything has to be understood in the perspective of creation. Harmony with space or creation is the starting point of their spirituality and their search for liberation. An awareness of being one with the whole of creation is, therefore, the spiritual foundation of the Adivasi peoples. In this unity of creation and spirituality, there is no clear cut distinction between sacred and secular, religion and non-religion. One sees the Supreme Being in space/creation and not outside of it. Since each Adivasi group is unique and different from one another, it is not possible to discuss their various worldviews here. However, the Mundas, Uraons (Kurukh speaking), Kharias, Santals and Hos, are the major Adivasi groups in the Chhotanagpur plateau of India running through the state of Jharkhand, some districts of Chhattisgarh, Orissa and West Bengal. It is hoped that they represent other similar Adivasi worldviews of the country as well in a satisfactory manner. They are reflected in their various creation accounts as given below.

Supreme Being

Each Adivasi group has a very clear idea of the Supreme Being as its creator and of the universe and its creatures. He is known by different names by different tribes as given below:

Tribe	Personal Name	Relational Name	Symbolic Name (In likeness)
Munda	Haram (Old One)	Grand Father Father	Sing Bonga (Sun-Spirit) Maran Buru (Great Mountain)
Ho	Gusia (Master)	Do	Do
Santal	Thakur Jiu (Spirit)	Do	Chando Baba (Sun-Father) Maran Buru (Great Mountain)
Kharia	Ponomesor (Unchanging One)	Do	Bero Lerang (Sun-Moon)
Kurukh	Dharmes (Beneficent One)	Do	Biri Belas (Sun- King)

None of the tribes mentioned above has made any *image* of their Creator in the past and present though they share in common His imagery as a benign *old man* with

white long hair and flowing beard on the dazzling white clouds. They have not made any *temple* for Him because they experience His presence everywhere.

Creation

Before the Supreme Being made the present world, in all the accounts there is a mention of the *sea* with its *creatures* covering everywhere. In His works of creation the Supreme Being takes the help of His own creatures, especially the sea creatures, such as, *crab, prawn, fish, turtle, tortoise*, etc. separately in bringing a tiny bit of clay to Him from the bottom of the sea in order to make the present earth. However, all of them failed in their mission because the sea water washed away the clay which they had tried to carry to the Supreme Being for making this world. However, the *earthworm* finally succeeds in fetching this bit of earth to the Supreme Being in the Munda and Kurukh accounts. He takes this bit of earth and makes the present earth.

Destruction

Offended by the evil deeds of the human beings as mentioned above, the Creator sent *rain of fire* on them for 7 days and 7 nights. All the human beings perished except the *bhaiya-bahin* (brother-sister). In the Kurukh account, the beloved of the Supreme Being had hidden the pair of male and female children in the hole of a *crab* covered with the *gangla* thicket (Job's tear) of the low-land. In the Kharia account, the king *Sembhu* and queen *Dakai* pulled the *brother* and *sister* inside the marsh and hid them. With destruction of the human beings, food supply to the Creator by way of offering sacrifice to Him by them ceased. He was thus very hungry and not happy without human beings. His beloved told Him that His happiness could return only with the finding of human beings alive. Consequently, He found the *bhaiya-bahin* after many disappointments and distress. After seeking and finding them, He brought them to His abode with great joy. He kept them with Him, fed them and looked after them lovingly with His fatherly care. He called them His *grand children* and they in return called Him *grand father*. Thus, the Creator renewed His relationship with the surviving human beings as their *grand father* who is very fond of His *grand children*, ever loving and forgiving. In this personal relationship with Him there is no oppressive fear. It is quite liberating.

New Creation

When the *bhaiya-bahin* grew up, He gave them *field* to cultivate, *oxen* to plough and *seeds* to sow and reap. When their *crops* were growing, some insects and pests attacked them and thus they were getting destroyed. The *bhaiya-bahin* then went up to the Supreme Being to tell Him their problem. After listening to them, He taught them the ritual of *danda-katta* (Kurukh). The *bhaiya-bahin* used to sleep separately by putting a log of the *simbali* (silk cotton) tree. One night they drank *hanria* (rice beer) and went to sleep. The Supreme Being and His beloved removed the log between them and they slept together as husband and wife. On reporting their experience to the Supreme Being, He said that it was all right. Thus, He instituted *marriage* and

introduced human beings to the secret of procreation so that they might multiply in this world. He divided them into various *gotars* (clans) in order to enter into marriage relationships outside one's own clan. The Adivasi clans consist of *animals, birds, fish, plants, minerals*, etc. They are called *totems*. This is the *new creation* of the Supreme Being and all men and women today are the *stewards* of this creation by not destroying and polluting it. His creative activity in this world thus continues to this day through the cooperation of human beings with Him.

Approach to God

Among the Adivasis, there are many forms of approaching God mainly by way of offering sacrifice to Him and praying to Him in an informal but personal way. However, there is one particular ritual among the Kurukh Adivasis which is worth discussing here because it is full of rich symbols. It expresses protection of *Dharmes* (Supreme Being) against evil. As life is experienced in a paradoxical existence of good and evil, life and death, the twofold end of the ritual is first, to obtain blessing, *viz.* happiness and prosperity of life in terms of sound health and increase in *progeny, cattle* and abundant yield from *crops* and secondly, to ward off evil.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

Trace the important aspects of the world views of the tribals (Adivasis) in India?

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Trace the important elements in the creation of human beings that are common in different accounts of Creation

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Cult of Deities and Spirits

The cult of deities and spirits was instituted later when the Adivasis came in contact with non-Adivasis. The Adivasis believe that God in His design has appointed various village spirits, nature spirits, etc. over them. Besides these, they have also their own personal or family spirits and they feel obliged to keep them well pleased by offering them animal sacrifices at different occasions. If they neglect this duty they think that the spirits become troublesome and send upon them various kinds of suffering and misfortune manifested in sickness, epidemics, drought, famine, etc. This thought causes a lot of *fear* in the minds and hearts of the Adivasis and they try to *appease* the

spirits concerned at any length with sacrifices of chickens, goats, oxen, buffaloes, etc. at the risk of their great financial loss. In spite of all their efforts, if the situation does not improve, they come to God at long last as their *ultimate* resort against evil and suffering because they believe that the spirits are also under God's power and control over them.

First Plough

In the Munda creation account, the 'Old One' started to make a plough for the man he had made. Taking a large tree he carved out of it the plough with its shaft, grip and handle; all in one piece. He took a long time to finish this work. His wife sent a *tiger* who rustled the leaves around him to distract Him. Taking a chip, the 'Old One', threw it at the tiger. At once the chip became a *wild dog* which chased the tiger away. That is why even to this day the tigers are afraid of wild dogs. The Santals share the similar worldview.

Creation of Heavenly Bodies

In the Munda and Kurukh accounts it is told that before the moon was made, the Sun was alone in the sky and it did not set. One day the Creator went to see the man making fields and asked him some questions: "When did you make this field?" "Now" was the answer. "When did you make that field?" "Now." "When did you make the yonder fields?" "Just now." "When did you eat from these fresh leaves?" "Now." "When did you eat from those dry leaves?" "Now." "When do you rest and when do you work?" "I rest *now* and work *now*." The Creator said: "You will not live on with such work and eating without regular times." So, He made the Sun to set and rise - thus *day* and *night* were made to work and to rest. He also made the moon to shine during the night.

4.4 LET US SUM UP

A knowledge of the social structure is required for the understanding of some features of religious thought. This amounts to saying that we have to account for religious facts in terms of the totality of the culture and society in which they are found. They must be seen as a relation of parts to one another within a coherent system, each part making sense only in relation to the others, and the system itself making sense only in relation to other institutional systems, as part of a wider set of relations. Religion plays an important part in the social life of the tribals. It helps them to preserve social cohesion, gives them confidence and so on. Do such explanations take us very far, and if they are true, which has to be proved, how does one set about determining in what way and in what degree does religion have these effects? What is most important is how religious beliefs and practices affect in any society the minds, the feelings, the lives, and the interrelations of its members

4.5. KEY WORDS

Tribe: A tribe is a social group of humans connected by a shared system of values and organized for mutual care, defense, and survival beyond that which could be attained by a lone individual or family.

Hypnosis: Hypnosis is a mental state or set of attitudes usually induced by a procedure known as a hypnotic induction, which is commonly composed of a series of preliminary instructions and suggestions.

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4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Totemism has been widely used to refer to animal or plant species and occasionally other things which are held in special regard by particular groups in a society. A totemic society is divided into a number of named groups, the members of which believe themselves to be descended unilineally from a common ancestor, and stand in a special relationship, usually involving respect and avoidance to some object.

Check your progress II

1. In almost world-wide, the institution of sacrifice is prevalent. There is usually an element of exchange in the relationship between men and spirits. It often involves the symbolic presenting or making over to them of some material or sometimes non-material thing. That is why sacrifice is offered. Sometimes this involves the destruction of what is offered, frequently the immolation of some living creature. Sometimes, however, food or drink is left for the spirit at the shrine. Sometimes living animals are dedicated to a ghost or spirit, and not actually killed. Always there is the idea of some deprivation on the part of the sacrificer, and always something is made over, transmitted from man to god or spirit. The meaning of sacrifice varies widely from culture to culture. In all these cultures sacrifice is a symbolic act. Sacrifice, is symbolic gift-giving.

2. The religious behaviour is essentially expressive, though it is generally thought of as instrumental as well. Instrumentally regarded, religious and magical beliefs and practices form part of systems of action. They have consequences, even if they are not always those envisaged by the people who have them. On the cognitive level, they provide satisfactory answers to otherwise insoluble questions. They fill gaps in human knowledge and experience and so diminish areas of doubt and uncertainty. Thus, religious belief and practice may give confidence in the face of dangers which would otherwise be overwhelming.

Check your progress III

1 In the Indian context, tribal peoples are called *Adivasis*, meaning original inhabitants. Adivasi worldview involves, first of all, an understanding and describing the Adivasi world as the Adivasi traditions look upon it, and then, conceptualizing and abstracting it. Indeed, the inside view of the Adivasi world involves, (a) collective interpretation that is reflected in Adivasi language, cosmology, rituals, customs, beliefs, myths, songs and stories; (b) the way the Adivasi traditions interpret time-space dimensions, (c) the way the Adivasis see their own identity and that of others, and (d) the way they interpret ethical dimensions.

2. In the different accounts of creation of human beings the Supreme Being first makes human figures out of clay and bakes them in the sun before putting life into them. However, except in Ho account in all other accounts there comes a *horse* from somewhere and kicks and destroys the human figures till the Supreme Being makes a dog(s)/tiger to chase away the destructive horse. Following it, in the Munda account, a large Indian *stork* laid two *eggs* on the land. A *boy* and a *girl* were born from these eggs. Similarly, in the Santal account, a *boy* and a *girl* were born from the *eggs* of *hans* and *hansil* (male-female swans).

